SKIPPY BEDELLE

OWEN JOHNSON

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By Owen Johnson

Lawrenceville Stories

THE PRODIGIOUS HICKEY
THE VARMINT
THE TENNESSEE SHAD
SKIPPY BEDELLE

STOVER AT YALE
THE WOMAN GIVES
VIRTUOUS WIVES
THE WASTED GENERATION
THE SALAMANDER
MAKING MONEY
THE SIXTY-FIRST SECOND

They walked in silence, oppressed by the greatness of their grief. FRONTISPIECE. *See page* 279

SKIPPY BEDELLE

HIS SENTIMENTAL PROGRESS FROM THE URCHIN TO THE COMPLETE MAN OF THE WORLD

BY

OWEN JOHNSON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

ERNEST FUHR

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To

CHARLES HANSON TOWNE

FOR AULD LANG SYNE

PREFACE

Likewise a Declaration of Principles

UNTIL the first great disillusions of his youth, the Bedelle Foot Regulator and the Mosquito-Proof Socks, had brought a new sentimental need of consolation and understanding, Skippy Bedelle's opinion of the feminine sex had been decidedly monastic. During the first twenty-five years of their existence, he regarded them as unmitigated nuisances, and pondering on them, he often wondered at the hidden purposes of the Creator. Later they might possibly serve some purpose by marrying and adding to the world's supply of boys. In a further progress, a sort of penitential progress, they became more valuable members of society, as maiden aunts who tipped you on the quiet, and grandmothers who mitigated parental severity and knew the exquisite art of ginger snaps, crisp and brown.

But before the skirted animal, which resembled but was quite unlike a man, had atoned for the error of her birth, Skippy refused to take her seriously. There were boys even younger than he who wore girls' jewelry, who wrote and received what were called "mash

notes," and who flaunted these sentimentalities openly. He knew such incomprehensible males did exist. There were three on his block and he had thrashed them all soundly and been thrashed for having thrashed them, which of course convinced him in his biblical estimate that women were created for the confusion of man.

Skippy's prejudice was of long root. From an early age he had been afflicted with sisters; one older and one younger, and he could find no mitigating circumstances between the sister who could hit you and could not be hit back, who never romped without pretending to howl, and the sister who put you at your ease when you had tripped over the parlor rug, by asking publicly:

"John, have you washed *behind* your ears?"

The thought of girls was inalienably connected in his memory with unnecessary washing up; with boring parties; with stiff collars; with unending polishing of shoes; humiliating walks down the avenue, stammering, idiotic phrases, while from every window the eyes of malicious friends were set in mockery. Girls never slid down the banisters or fell out of apple trees, or snapped garter snakes, or raised white mice or collected splinters coasting down the icehouse roof. Girls were always spruced up and shining; always covered with pink ribbons and waiting for callers; always dressing and undressing;

always kissing their worst enemies in public instead of giving them a dig in the ribs or treading on their toes and whispering under their breath:

"Wait till I catch you outside; I 'll tear the hide off er yer!"

Girls spoiled vacations. It was on account of girls, to give them something to do, that dancing schools were invented; that pews in churches were stiff and uncomfortable; that ministers stormed and threatened until the hour hand had gone its round. In a word, wherever life was drab, or stiff, or formal, wherever prohibitions intervened to check the young impulse, wherever the policing principle showed itself, at the bottom somewhere the feminine sex must be the cause.

Gradually, of course, some mitigation came to this inveterate contempt; gradually he did begin to distinguish between girls as such and women. He saw that some such line of demarcation must be drawn but it was still confused and hazy. Later on it was undoubtedly true that woman must play some part in a man's life; this much he gathered from novels and the ways of those giants to his imagination, the great Turkey Reiter and Charlie de Soto.

Undoubtedly in the long process of evolution from the clam to the stripling, morality was the contribution of the imitative monkey period each boy passes as he merges towards perfect

manhood. A thousand supplications, commandings, and exhortations cannot accomplish what the spectacle of a Turkey Reiter or a Charlie de Soto or a Dink Stover instantly achieves in its casual Olympic passing. Such, with all due respect to the efforts of secondary education, are the real moral forces of youth.

When therefore Skippy had made choice of his heroes and slavishly set himself in imitation, he had been unpleasantly disturbed by their evident friendliness to the sex he despised and after much mental perturbation perceived that sooner or later he, too, would share the common lot and actually take pleasure in explaining to something pink and white, with large rolling eyes and smiling teeth, that the game of baseball is played with a ball and a bat and that the fielder and not the batter is chasing the ball, that the difference between baseball and football is that a baseball hurts the hands and a football hurts the foot.

Some day when he grew to be Captain of the Eleven like Dink Stover undoubtedly he would condescend to be gazed at and flattered and fondled. If Dink Stover could stand the way Tough McCarthy's sister hung on his arm and flirted openly before the whole school — why of course in permitting such a display of affection Dink Stover was right, for Dink Stover could do no wrong. Some day, then, like his hero, he would condescend to be adored. Some day his

turn would come as they sang at the immortal Weber and Fields:

> "For I must love some one,
> And it may as well be you."

But all this was in the uncharted future. His attitude toward the sex was still the attitude of normal soap-defying boyhood, defensive and belligerent. Yet all this was to change, in the twinkling of an eye, in one short season. The first great disillusionments of youth were at hand and woman with the mask of sympathy and understanding waiting to fashion the man out of the urchin. By what ways, ludicrous and tragically comic, this sentimental progression was achieved is here set down in reverent reminiscence.

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SKIPPY BEDELLE

CHAPTER I

Fate in a Bathtub

THERE comes a moment when without warning boy and puppy instantaneously pass into the consciousness of manhood. With the young canine it comes with the first deep-throated defiance of the intruder, the instinct that the wriggling, fawning days are over and that the moment to attack and accept attack has arrived. With the human puppy the change is more elusive. To some it comes with the first clinging splendor of long trousers, to others with the first hopeless love, when at the tragic age of fifteen the world, fate and the disparity of ages intervene. But usually this transformation, all in the twinkling of an eye, from the hungry slouch of boyhood into the stern and brooding adolescence, comes with the discovery of a controlling idea. Without any apparent cause, some illuminating purpose descends on the imagination, the future opens, and in the vision of a future Napoleon, a P. T. Barnum, a millionaire or a predestined genius the man emerges.

When Skippy Bedelle at the age of fifteen years and three months, in the warmth of early Spring, rambled across the green stretches to his appointed rendezvous with Compulsory Bath, he went as a puppy sidles to an undetermined purpose, with a skipping, broken motion, occasionally halting for an extra hitch at the long undisciplined trousers. A cap rode on the straw-colored shock of hair which hung like weeds over the freckled, sharp nose and the wide and famished mouth. Once the idea occurred to him to turn a cartwheel, and he promptly landed sprawling on his back, picked himself up, skipped forward a dozen steps, stooped to tighten a shoe lace and arrived breathlessly before Doc Cubberly, who was eyeing him, watch in hand.

Thirty seconds later he was contemplating the tips of his toes from the warm and delicious water, yielding to the relaxing ecstasy of pleasant day dreams. He had no quarrel with water as such, though from principle and to remain regular he rebelled against the element of compulsion, but water, particularly warm water, brought him a quickening of the imagination.

Now between water as such and bath, particularly compulsory bath, is all the difference between the blue freedom of the sky and the allotted breathing space which is enclosed in a cage. There was something peculiarly humiliating and servile in being forced to soap

and water three times a week under penalty of having your name read out before a tittering schoolroom — *Absent from Bath!* It vaguely recalled medieval days and such abominations as the inspection of ears and the prying intrusion of governesses!

Skippy was aware of all this and publicly voiced his indignation at the despotic practice. To have done otherwise would have been to draw down a storm of ridicule. There are certain traditions in school life as firmly established as the doctrine of infant damnation in the good old days of theology. Secretly, however, Skippy adored the first warm contact of the tentative toes, the slow ecstasy of the mounting ripple over the sinking body and the long, drowsy languor of complete submersion. It was the apotheosis of happiness when all the aches and vexations of the day disappeared in a narcotic reverie, when he could forget the scorn of the Roman, flunking him; the jibes of Slugger Jones, the rigorous discipline of Turkey Reiter and the base ingratitude of Dennis de Brian de Boru Finnegan, who had refused him the price of a jigger, with pockets that bulged with the silver he had loaned him.

"Well, I 'll be jiggswiggered!"

Skippy looked up hastily to perceive the unwashed features of Slops Barnett peering over the partition in set disapproval.

"Hello, Slops!"

"What are you doing that for?"

"Doing what?"

"Getting into it," said Slops in an angry whisper. "You 're a nice one, you are!"

Slops' method of rebellion, which antedated the hunger strike, was to submit to a superior authority so far as outward appearances required. But once safely behind a locked door, he employed the minimum of ten minutes in simulating the bathing process by immense disturbances in the bathtub, produced without recourse to disrobing processes, while gleefully chanting:

"Mother may I go out to swim?
Yes, my darling daughter.
Hang your clothes on a hickory limb
But don't go near the water!
Don't go near, don't go near, don't go near the water!"

Publicly Skippy stood pledged to this uncompromising defiance of the Powers That Be, so with Slops Barnett's accusing glance on him, he answered hastily:

"I caught an awful cold and got to steam it out!"

"Faker!"

"Honest, Slops."

At this moment a dripping sponge came spinning through the air and struck the young irreconcilable squarely between the shoulders.

"If Pee-wee Davis threw that sponge I 'll skin him alive," announced Slops wrathfully. Instantly the air was filled with flying sponges.

Instantly the air was filled with flying sponges. *Page* 4

Towels, like dripping comets, passed and repassed, while Doc Cubberly came hobbling in, threatening, imploring and dodging stray missiles.

Skippy, safe below the surface, watched this bombardment swing over head, die out and silence return. One by one his fellow prisoners emerged, vociferous, hilarious, and passed moist and voicing imprecations into the outer region. Still Skippy continued gorgeously to steam and doze.

Then a sharp rat-tat-tat on the door.

"Mr. Bedelle?"

"Hello, Doc!"

"Time 's up."

"All right, almost dressed. Coming fast."

The crucial moment had arrived, the tragic end to all happiness below, that inevitable moment when he must, by some supreme exercise of the will, rise out of this blissful warmth and stretch a reluctant arm through the chilly air to let in the cold water. End of dreams and chill return of reality! He temporized. A second time Doc Cubberly's sliding step arrived.

"Mr. Bedelle — Mr. Bee-delle!"

"Just buttoning on my collar, Doc!"

For the hundredth time, one foot slowly emerged and five over-civilized toes sought in vain to turn the round faucet labeled "Cold." A hundred, yes a thousand times, he had at-

tempted the apelike expedient before the final mental determination to rise out of the warm spell into the frigid air.

"Gee, if I could only turn that with my foot," he said. "Lord, what a cinch that would be!"

He tried a last ineffectual time, jerked up precipitately, shot out his arm, let in the cold water and dodged back below the surface.

CHAPTER II

Birth of an Idea

TEN minutes later he sidled out of the bath and, having balanced Doc Cubberly's Grand Army hat on the gas jet, and simulated an attack on Tippy, the black and tan, escaped before the guardian of the bath could return to the rescue of his pet.

"All the same, you ought to be able to work a bathtub with your foot," he said as he went skipping towards the village with heightened appetite. "Gee, that *would* be scrumptious!"

Suddenly a queer thought came to him. After all—why not? All you needed was a foot regulator, to let in the hot and cold water gorgeously, at your ease and inclination! Foot regulators! Why not? There was something in that idea surely.

"Gee, what a cinch that *would* be!"

If man in his age-old struggle with nature could harness the force of steam to his service and ride the air, why should he not be master of his daily comforts?

"I don't think a foot regulator would be so ding fired hard to invent," he said, meditating.

The idea had begun to work, though as yet the vast scale had not opened to his tender imagination. Now in youth when an idea begins

to grow it brings sharp animal appetites. To contemplate properly this new entrancing thought, he repaired to that first station on the hunger route, which was known as Laloo's Kennels, where fragrant hot dogs sent their tantalizing invitation from bubbling tins.

"Two ki-yis and easy on the mustard."

Mr. Laloo prospered because Mr. Laloo dealt on a strictly cash basis. He was languidly tired. One foot rested on a soap box, one arm rested on the upholstered divan he had exchanged with the late Hickey Hicks for a hot dog a day in the lean month of December, and his head drooped over the supporting toothpick. Mr. Laloo never made an unnecessary motion or uttered a superfluous word. So he continued without apparent notice to conserve the feeble energy which ran low in his burnt-out eyes.

Skippy looked at Laloo and understood. Freshmen might argue but even the Tennessee Shad wasted no time in producing the coin. There was exactly ten cents in Skippy's pocket after the most painstaking search revealed this last ray of hope in the lining of the threadbare pocket. Only ten cents to stop the deficit in his stomach! The choice was difficult. There was ginger-pop at Bill Appleby's, and jiggers at Al's, pancakes at Conover's, and the aching void within him knew no prejudice or limitations to its hospitality. He hesitated, but the fragrance in the air was maddening — besides

there was always the chance of a friend in funds. He fingered the coin regretfully and laid it on the counter with a heavy heart. He might argue with Bill and plead with Al, but Laloo had the soul of a pawnbroker.

"There 's the bank roll, pick out the fat ones!"

Five minutes later, with his nose buried in a fragrant sandwich, elbows on the counter, he returned to The Great Idea. Suddenly the sublimity of the conception smote him. Think of lolling languidly under the surface and regulating the temperature at will with only the exposure of a foot! Think of the gain to humanity in the added daily comfort! The idea was stupendous, colossal! It beat even Dink Stover's famous Sleep Prolonger, the Alarm Clock, which automatically closed the window and opened the hot air register at the designated hour. And out of the world, out of the whole human race, present and past, he, John C. Bedelle, was the first to stumble upon this revolutionary fact! An accident? Perhaps — but so was Galileo's discovery of the telescope an accident. When the gnawing appetite had been placated (somewhat placated, but not convinced), the Skippy Bedelle who descended Laloo's steps, with grave and thoughtful face, had emerged from the warm skin of the urchin, with the consciousness of manhood's call to service.

CHAPTER III

Macnooder Opens Vistas

TO Skippy's credit be it recorded that the first impulse was humanitarian. For the second was distinctly mercenary. But then Skippy lived in a materialistic age and Skippy's father owned a department store. Yet the practical and profitable possibilities did not proceed from any inward contamination of the generous impulse of invention, but from contact and suggestion. At Bill Appleby's, where he wandered in hungrily, in a desperate hope of meeting some friend whose memory could be jogged by reference to past favors, he perceived the celebrated Doc Macnooder in earnest conclave with Appleby, to whom he was offering to sell the Lawrenceville rights of his latest invention, the Folding Toothbrush. Given Bill Appleby's natural canniness, and Macnooder's hypnotic eloquence, the discussion was apt to be long and difficult, so Skippy hovered at a respectable distance with ears at attention.

At this time, due to a rift in the lute (a little matter of expert accounting on a joint operation), the firm of Macnooder and the Tennessee Shad had been dissolved and each financier had assumed an independent and belligerent attitude. The Shad had a certain adroit and de-

vious imagination, but the practical mind was Macnooder. His point of view was purely economic. Hickey might plan the daring manœuvre which made the conquest of the clapper possible, and revel in the faculty's amazement at the sudden silence of the tyrant will. Macnooder would have proceeded to capitalize this imagination by fabricating clapper watch charms and selling them at auction prices. The Gutter Pup might organize the sporting club in memory of the lamented Marquis of Queensberry; Macnooder sold the tickets and extinguished the surplus. His ambition was not to be a philosopher, or a benefactor. He announced openly that he intended to be a millionaire, and among his admiring victims there was much speculation as to just how far he had gone in the accomplishment of his heart's ambition.

When Skippy moved into an eavesdropping position, the situation was this: Bill Appleby, having carefully closed and locked the cash drawer, was braced with both arms extended against the counter, eyeing Macnooder with a look of steely negation that expressed a settled conviction to doubt instantly any statement whenever or however made. Macnooder's round capuchin body was drawn up in confidence and ease and the smile on his face was bland as he remarked:

"Bill—get my proposition; let it percolate,

sift down and settle. But, Bill, make no mistake. The Macnooder Folding Toothbrush is a fact — patented and financed! I 'm not asking you to take stock, — no, Bill, no." He shook his head and said with friendly regret — "I could n't, Bill; not in fairness to myself — not in fairness to my family. Why, Bill, if you were to get in on the ground floor, you 'd buy a yacht in five years, live on Fifth Avenue and marry Lillian Russell."

"Go slow," said Appleby huskily, for Appleby was a bachelor.

"Well, watch *me*," said Macnooder with a wave of his hand that played among the rubies and emeralds floating in his imagination. "Bill, I 'd like to put you in — I can't — that 's flat. I can't! Why, Bill, if you put your hand in your pocket this moment and took out that little green wallet of yours and said: 'Mr. Macnooder, this is your account — it 's nothing — I dismiss it, I tear it to pieces — you are my guest from now on; let 's start right; — what will you have?' If you should say that —"

"I won't!" said Appleby, shrinking from the hypnotic caress in the financier's manner.

"If you should do that *and* should take out a nice new one hundred dollar bill — you have one, Bill, right in that old leather wallet — don't shrink, Bill, your alarm pains me — if you, now, here in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, John C. Green Foundation, should produce that

one hundred dollar bill — slap it on the counter, shove it into my face, force it into my pocket, beg me to give you a little interest — *no!* No, Bill, no! I 'd refuse — I 'd *have* to refuse. Don't build up any false hopes, Bill, don't."

"I won't," said Appleby, yet already a sense of great personal loss had begun to invade him.

"All I can let you in on are the regional rights — the Lawrenceville rights — for ten years. I might, I don't say it flat, — I want to consider, — but I *might* extend them to Princeton. It 's a gift, but I might. And do you know why I 'm giving you this opportunity of a lifetime?"

"Why, Doc?"

" Because, Bill, I don't want to break you. I don't want to have to run you out of business. That 's friendship, but there 's more. I can use you," said Macnooder magnanimously. "You have the qualities I shall need in my future operations — I suffer from them now but I appreciate them. You will make an ideal watchdog of the dollar, and when the dollar leaves your hand, Bill, there won't be a rim left to it. Bill, let 's do business — it 's more than just the toothbrush, it 's a whole future 's open to you. Bill, the moment is yours. Choose! Fifth Avenue, a yacht, box at the opera — Lillian Russell!"

Appleby fumbled in his pocket and drew out

a cigar to break the spell, and the hand that held the match trembled.

"Wall, now," he began cautiously, "to-morrow 's to-morrow, and toothbrushes is toothbrushes. And say — gettin' down to tacks — who in Sam Hill ever wanted a folding toothbrush, nohow?"

Macnooder's fist descended on a shivering glass counter as he cried triumphantly:

"Say that again!"

"Wall, who does want a folding toothbrush?" said Appleby, in a more bellicose manner.

"Bill, your hand!" said Macnooder, matching the gesture to the exclamation. "Straight to the point. Keen — Gad, you 're devilishly keen! That 's you, Bill, no one can beat you at seeing the kernel at once! Who wants a folding toothbrush? No one!" said Macnooder, folding his arms and beaming with delight. "Is there any reason any one should? There is not. Can you imagine anything more unnecessary, idiotic or useless than a folding toothbrush? Don't try — you can't. That 's the beauty of it. But, Bill, make no mistake — that 's where you get the heterogeneous sucker! Has there ever been a folding toothbrush? Never! That 's where they bite! Think of it — no one 's ever had one before. How do they know whether they want one until they 've tried it? They 've had a bicycle or a kodak, but a

folding toothbrush, Bill—think what it means! Get the sound of it. Why, Bill, it 's sunk into your imagination already! You 've got the hankering yourself. You have. I can feel it!"

"Wall, now, I would sorter like a squint at one."

"And you shall," said Macnooder, reaching into his pocket. But at this moment he stopped, perceiving Skippy, who, lost in wonder, was listening, all ears.

"I beg your pardon, Doc, honest, I could n't help hearing," he said hastily.

"This is a private conversation," said Macnooder severely.

"I say, Doc," said Skippy, gazing at the package which had come forth from an inner pocket, "I say, Doc, can't I just have one look at it?"

"You can *not*," said Macnooder, whose hand indicated the exit in the classic gesture of melodrama when the cruel father dismisses the penniless lover.

Skippy drew a long breath, hesitated and went slowly out. But what a world had opened before him! It was something to be a benefactor of humanity, but why not tap the wealth of the Incas! If the mere invention of a folding toothbrush could open the sacred precincts of Fifth Avenue, what realms beyond the dreams of avarice were waiting for him who should revolutionize the bathtub!

CHAPTER IV

Loneliness of Great Men

THE course of his meditations suddenly halted before the Jigger Shop. They were all there; the fortunate possessors of dimes and nickels, gluttonously, selfishly gorging themselves with juicy creamy strawberry, coffee, and chocolate jiggers; clinking their glasses, licking their spoons—and he, John C. Bedelle, the future Bathtub King, without a cent in his pockets! The irony of it! If they only knew, what sycophants would fawn upon him! Then an idea came to him—at such moments alone can man read the secret heart of humanity. He would make a test of true friendship.

He passed through the outer rapturous fringe of hungry boyhood and slowly approached the counter where Al, guardian of the jigger, dished out the jiggers and watched the counters with uneasy eye. Not that he had any hope, but it was only fair to give even the most abandoned of mankind a sporting chance.

"Hello, Al!"

"I see you, Skippy."

The tone was not encouraging. Bedelle determined on direct methods. He turned his pockets deliberately inside out.

"You see?"

"Oh yes, I see you."

"Anything doin'?"

"Nothing doin'," said Al, stroking his corn-colored mustache with that languid finality against which there was no appeal. "Nothin' at all."

"He has had his chance," said Bedelle to himself in gloomy pride. Yes, Al had had his chance, that one chance that comes unwittingly to every man — Al who might have toured the world with him as his majordomo, or his confidential valet.

"Hello, Dennis!" he said, perceiving back of an enormous chocolate éclair the human anaconda famine and opportunity had at this moment made of Finnegan, the discoverer of the double adjective.

"Hello yourself!"

"How 's the bank account?" said Skippy lightly, for etiquette forbade any reference to the half-dollar parted with on the Wednesday before.

"Why, bless my immortal soul, you old rambunctious, skipping Zockarooster, are you setting them up?" said Brian de Boru, pretending to misunderstand.

Skippy disdained a reply. Al, after all, was but running true to form, but this was the basest ingratitude, — the serpent's tooth in the fair landscape of friendship.

"If he 'd at least offered to share that éclair I—I could—" said Skippy to himself, and then stopped in silence before the future Finnegan had thrown to the winds. For he liked Dennis and Dennis *would* have made such an ideal publicity man.

He passed like a poor relation at a wedding feast, and as he passed with many a stammered hint, and eloquently pleading eyes, his faith in his kind began to ooze away. Of course it was the end of the month, yet of twenty friends who had fed from his hand, when his hand had been hospitable, not one stirred to the commonest of human impulses. And so gloomy, alone and misunderstood, like the young Napoleon at Brienne, John C. Bedelle, with the consciousness of future greatness, moved out from the uncomprehending crowd. At the door Toots Cortrelle arrived with unmistakably jingling pockets, and seeing him, cried with the zest of young hunger certain of gratification:

"Hullo, Skippy, old sockbutts!"

"Could n't lend me a quarter or a dime, could you?" said Skippy solemnly.

"Why not?"

"You can, Toots—you can, honest?"

"With ease and pleasure. This is the way it is done," said Toots, who proceeded to transfer a quarter from his pocket to the astounded Skippy, with the classic manner of a prestidigitator.

"What 's happened?" said Skippy, feeling that the situation demanded some explanation.

"Maiden aunt and birthday," said Toots joyfully. "Al, take Mr. Bedelle's order and make mine a triple jigger, coffee with chocolate syrup!"

When ten minutes later, gorged and sated, with his faith in humanity somewhat restored, Skippy separated from his benefactor, he turned to Toots and said solemnly:

"Old friend, I shall remember this!"

"All right—turn about 's fair play. Ta-ta and so long," said Cortrelle, all unsuspecting of the future Destiny had built up for him.

"Yes, some day I *shall* remember," said Skippy solemnly to himself. And as he trudged back to his room at the Kennedy, there to map out the future operations of the Bathtub Trust, he allowed his imagination to dwell delightfully on that momentous future date when the debt of friendship should be paid. He saw himself in a gorgeous marble-lined office, protected by an outer fringe of obsequious secretaries, a box of expensive cigars on his shining mahogany desk, and before him in respectful attention Toots Cortrelle, now grown a man, but worn and wasted with the buffeting years, and he saw the light of hope spurting upward in the tired eyes as he heard himself saying:

"Cortrelle, once long ago, you did something I told you I should remember. You have for-

gotten it. I never forget. For that I am going to put you in charge of my whole South American trade at a salary—" Here Skippy paused somewhat perplexed before continuing, awed at his own munificence—"at a salary of over *three thousand dollars* a year!"

But just as Toots with tears in his eyes was starting to grasp his hand, Skippy's foot tripped over a step and he rolled ignominiously down the terrace and fetched up in a heap among the gravel.

"Oh, please do it again!" said the voice of Snorky Green from an upper window.

"You go to blazes!" exclaimed Skippy, rising wrathfully. But all at once his anger left him. Snorky Green was his roommate and partner of his secrets, and the secret that had been locked up within him these last momentous hours simply had to be told.

CHAPTER V

The Golden Shower

TEN minutes later Snorky Green was standing in a daze, one hand on an open Bible,—taken for the occasion from the room of the Pink Rabbit,—and gazing into the flushed countenance of his roommate, who was saying:

"Snorky, are you a Christian?"

"Say, what do you—"

"No matter—you believe in God!"

"Sure I do."

"Then swear!"

"Swear what?"

"Swear never to reveal to man, woman or child what I am about to disclose to you."

"I swear!"

"As I am a Christian and believe in God."

"As I am a Christian and believe in God."

"And if I do may God strike with his afflictions those I love best—"

"Oh, I say—"

"Say it."

Snorky reluctantly subscribed to this terrible oath and five minutes later the Secret was his.

"Great Jehosophat!"

"Do you see it?"

"Do I see it?" Snorky tore from his throat the collar that was stifling him. "My aunt's

cat's pants!" he said solemnly. "Skippy, we 'll be billionaires!"

"We 'll buy a yacht and live on Fifth Avenue," said Skippy, who for sentimental reasons suppressed any reference to Lillian Russell.

"Say this is so big we 've got to take every precaution," said Green, whose imagination was on more practical lines. "No one must even suspect until we 've got this drawn up and patented."

"That 's what worries me."

Snorky Green cautiously opened the door and investigated the hall, then returning drew up his chair and said in a confidential whisper:

"Skippy, when this goes through every bathtub in the country will go in the scrap heap. Think of that!"

"I have thought of that."

"It 'll do what the pneumatic tube did to the bicycle."

"What the trolley did to the horse-car!"

"It 's revolutionary."

"It is."

" Enormous!"

"Stupendous!"

They shook hands and Skippy, bursting with happiness, said impulsively:

"Old friend, whatever I make — you 're down for half."

"No, no. Two-thirds to you — one-third to

me," said Snorky, as Cæsar putting from him the proffered crown.

"I won't have it — share and share alike," said Skippy in a rush of emotion.

"But, Skippy, do you realize what even one-third will mean?" said Snorky, in a voice trembling with the vision of the future. He went nervously to the desk and returned with pad and pencil. "Write down these figures."

"Ought we to?"

"We 'll destroy it afterward. Put down ninety-two million."

"What 's that?"

"The population of the United States."

"I see — ninety-two it is."

"Divide that by — by — well let 's be conservative."

"It 's better."

"Let 's say there 's one bathtub to every fifty-five inhabitants."

"I think that 's too conservative."

"We must n't let our imagination run away with us," said Snorky. "One in fifty and then we 're safe."

"Well, let 's say two million bathtubs," said Skippy, who disliked figures, and felt the first promptings of avarice.

"So be it. Two million bathtubs and on every tub our royalty!"

"What 'll we ask?"

"What do you suppose a bathtub averages?"

"Say fifty dollars, at ten per cent, — that would be five dollars coming to us."

"Five dollars, but Skippy, is n't that exorbitant?"

"You forget we 'll be in a position to dictate."

"Holy Maria!"

Under 2,000,000 he wrote the figure five and slowly noted the colossal result.

"Do you realize what that means?"

"It means ten million dollars!"

"No, it means more than that — it means that if the Bathtub Combine came to us to-day and offered us a million dollars — it would be suicide to accept it!"

Skippy's eyes dilated with excitement. Slowly he tore the sheet of paper in two.

"Burn it — take no chances," said Snorky, who proceeded to light a match.

"And that 's only the United States," said Skippy in a whisper.

"There 's Canada and the British Empire!"

"But Englishmen carry rubber tubs with them."

"They can be educated."

"The French don't bathe," said Skippy mournfully.

"That 'll come."

"Holy cats, Rockefeller won't be in it!" said Skippy, who was suffocating. "Snorky, what I said goes! Money is n't everything. No —

sentiment 's bigger. Fifty-fifty, I said, and fifty-fifty it stands!''

''Then I 'll put money into it,'' said Snorky, offering his hand. ''I 'll go to my father. But not now — not a word until we get the patent. If any one gets the idea we 're lost!''

Skippy jumped at the sound of Butsy White's elephantine descent of the stairs.

''And Skippy,'' said Snorky Green, with a sudden realization of a man's frailties, ''whatever you do — never tell a woman. You understand?''

Skippy, whose relations with the opposite sex were of the cat-and-dog variety, solemnly raised his hand.

''I swear.''

''Now to be practical. I say, Skippy, we do have to invent the regulator, you know.''

CHAPTER VI

Methods of a Financier

WHEN, after a dream-ridden night, Skippy started across the campus to morning chapel, the urchin's wabble had gone from his legs forever. He moved with firm and measured tread, shoulders thrown back and head erect, every inch a man, and his glance was set into the future with proud recognition of his place in the complex scheme of things. The imagination, which returns after the sense of humor, was still drowsy with the painful waking effort in chapel, but as he proceeded to Memorial Hall, the glittering future approached a little nearer. Some day he, John C. Bedelle, would return to the old school a patron and a benefactor!

"They ought to have a gymnasium," he thought, appraising the campus in a burst of generosity. "I 'll give it to them. I 'll give them a gym that 'll beat anything hollow. I 'll give them the finest architect in the country. I will! And when it 's all built and ready to dedicate—" But all at once as he started to visualize himself before the applauding crowd Snorky Green jogged his elbow:

"Skippy—Gee, I 've got it!"

"What?"

"Sh — sh! You know — the invention! Meet me in the room after first recitation. Mum 's the word!"

A little unworthy feeling of jealousy came to Skippy at this announcement; almost a feeling of having been defrauded. Yet after all he had only himself to blame. The temptation of the future had beguiled him from the present necessity. He slid into his seat, conveniently protected, by the broad back of Tubby Banks, from the searching gaze of Lucius Cassius Hopkins, better known as the Roman, who presently would number him among the flunked. Then when the attack centered among the R's and S's, across the room, he drew forth a pencil and attacked the problem of a practical foot regulator. But immediately the deplorable deficiency of his education struck him. What preparation had he for his life's vocation? Of mathematics he knew absolutely nothing! The priceless years had been squandered on mere Latin, English prose, French verbs and the vexing grammars.

"I must have a scientific education," he said, drawing rough outlines on the margin of Cæsar's Gallic Wars. "How in the deuce am I to begin? A foot 's sort of different. Shall I make it a button to press on or a sort of slipper to push up and down?"

There was a cut of the famous bridge across

the Rhine, but a hurried examination brought him no comfort. He looked over at Snorky across the aisles and Snorky winked back at him in the triumph of achievement. Still if Snorky was to share in the fabulous returns it was only right that Snorky should contribute to the practical details! The truth is that Skippy in calmer mood had already begun to regret the impulse of the day before. Five million dollars after all was a good deal to give away in a gesture, even to the chum of chums!

"What the deuce got into me?" he thought gloomily. Until that moment the sinister corruption of money had been foreign to his nature, but all at once a change came to his outlook. "Gee, even a third would have been a *whale* of a sum!"

He rose and flunked horribly in an attempt to classify an ablative absolute and answered "unprepared" when the Roman, maliciously pressing his advantage, insisted on his translating. Then with sulky dignity he strode to the blackboards with the B's and C's and the D's and flunked once more on the conjugation of an irregular verb. What time was this for trivial annoyances when his whole soul was rent with the thought of the millions which he had squandered for a moment's sentimental impulse! He was not ashamed of that impulse, no — but, all the same, Snorky, if he had had

finer feelings, would never have abused his generosity!

"What 's the matter?" said the chum of chums, when, recitations over, they had gained the secrecy of their bedroom. "You look positively bilious."

"I did n't sleep much," said Skippy, eyeing him with intuitive disfavor.

"Well, for Heaven's sake brace up; you look as though you 'd swallowed a porcupine!"

"All very well for you to cheer up," Skippy thought to himself. It hurt, there was no turning from it. It did hurt. What a blunder he had made!

"I could have hired him on a salary," he thought gloomily. But of course now there could be no backing out.

"Well, now what have *you* worked out?" said Snorky triumphantly.

"I? My mind has been concentrating on the business organization."

"Gaze on this!" Snorky proudly brought forth a diagram which to Skippy's bewildered gaze looked like the cross section of a switch yard. "Do you get it?"

"What 's this?"

"That? Why that 's the bathtub, you chump."

"It does n't look like any bathtub."

"You 're in it, looking down — see, this is the line of the water. Here 's the hot and cold —"

"But this and that—"

"That 's your legs, of course. You 're in the tub looking south. Your legs stick out, don't they, and these are the foot regulators—"

"They look like feet."

"They are feet—that is, your feet stick in 'em."

"But how does it work?"

Snorky produced another scrawl.

"This is a cross section, you see. Works both ways. This you work with your hands. Then you turn it on here with this catch, and your foot regulators come into play—see?"

"It 's awfully complicated."

"Ought to be."

"Why?"

"'Cause if you just had an attachment to put on the spigots, you might n't get more than a dollar a tub."

"He 's thinking of the money," thought Skippy, darkly.

"You don't seem enthusiastic."

"No-o—."

"I say, Skippy, you are n't natural," said Snorky in alarm. "You don't look at me as you used to. What is it? Out with it now."

"Well," said Skippy slowly, "I said fifty-fifty and I stick to it; fifty-fifty, because I am a man of my word, but I do think there ought to be some limit . . . "

Ten minutes later, when Snorky's infectious laugh had restored his sense of humor, Bedelle, Incorporated took up the transaction of business again, — the discussion of the profits having by mutual consent been adjourned to a later session.

"Skippy, old top, I 'm thinking we 've got to get expert advice," said Snorky after a morning of fruitless discussion.

"You mean —"

"I mean Doc Macnooder or the Tennessee Shad."

"I 'm afraid so, too. This is bigger than us."

"It 's a hard choice."

"It is — and we 've got to be protected."

"You bet we 've got to be protected."

"Well, if we must choose between Macnooder and the Shad, which would you rather trust?"

"Trust no one," said Snorky, finding it impossible to establish this distinction. "And say, Skippy, — oaths on the Bible are all right, but if we 're going to let Macnooder in on this he 's got to sign a paper."

"You betcha!" said Skippy, with whom a little of Bill Appleby's distrust remained. "A paper 's the thing!"

That afternoon, after due ceremony, the door was closed and locked and Doc Macnooder inducted into an easy chair. Skippy producing the Bible said firmly:

"Doc, you 've got to take the oath; never to reveal to man, woman—"

"But I 'm a Unitarian," said Macnooder, examining the St. James version.

The point was debated and passed over. Snorky then produced a formidable document tied in green ribbons with large wax seals, stamped with a cameo stick-pin.

"You 'll have to sign this, too."

"Sign what?"

Snorky read rapidly:

"I, Doc Macnooder, in my third form year, Lawrenceville, New Jersey, hereby testify that on this date, the 12th day of April, 1896, the information written on the back of the present sheet of paper was communicated to me by John C. Bedelle, the rightful and lawful inventor, and the document does hereby establish all his rights. Signed—"

"Yes, but what 's on the other side?" said Macnooder, with rising curiosity.

"That can only be communicated to you after your signature."

Macnooder was wary, but Macnooder was inquisitive. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully and considered.

"Is Dink Stover in this, or the Tennessee Shad?" he asked cautiously.

"Not a soul besides us two has the slightest suspicion."

"All right then—I 'll sign."

"Skippy, you tell—" said Snorky Green generously, "the glory is yours."

"It 's an invention that 's got to do with a bathtub, with all bathtubs," said Skippy, with a sudden faintness of confidence before the professional agnosticism which Macnooder, the man of affairs, now assumed by crossing his legs and donning a large horn-rimmed pair of spectacles.

"The word is *bathtub*," said Macnooder, who not to appear too eager dug a knife from his pocket and carefully whittled at the end of his pencil.

"It 's a foot regulator!"

"Aha!" said Macnooder, who did n't understand at all.

"You see, Doc, what 's the matter with all the bathtubs of to-day," said Skippy, picking up courage, "your head 's at one end and the faucets are at the other—and, that 's an awful distance!"

"Good point!" said Macnooder, nodding.

"Now when you want to let in the cold water you 've got to sit up, reach down and turn it on and that 's cold and chilly and drafty as the mischief, is n't it?"

"That 's a very strong point," said Macnooder, who began to see.

"Now, if you could only turn the faucets with your toes, you could lie quietly under the hot water, could n't you? . . . But you can't—but you could if you had foot regulators. And

is n't it the simplest thing in the world to have foot regulators? Only no one has ever thought of it before?"

"Think what it would do to the bathtub industry, Doc," said Snorky, who felt the preceding explanation had failed properly to illuminate the epochal quality of the invention. "Why, Doc, we 'd have 'em by the throat. We 'd put every bathtub out of existence. The whole dinged system is fossilized and we 'd show 'em up with the first exhibit. Do you see it, Doc? Do you get the possibilities?"

"At first sound," said Macnooder, who kept his glance on the end of his pencil, not to reveal how much his imagination had been stirred, "at first sound, it interests me strangely. Skippy,—Mr. Bedelle, your hand, and my congratulations."

"Oh, I say, Doc," said Skippy, with a lump in his throat, "you really do believe in it, don't you?"

"My boy, there are gold mines in it," said Macnooder, carefully, "the wealth of the Sultan is nothing to it, or—or it is n't worth a plugged nickel."

Skippy and Snorky exchanged glances of sudden dismay.

"It 's one or the other. That 's what I will find out."

"How 'll you do that?" said the roommates, in a breath.

"I shall write for catalogues first. I may have to conduct a personal investigation at the patent office — and of course I must look at all possibilities. The idea is revolutionary," said Macnooder, reviving their spirits. "Mr. Bedelle, nothing can deprive you of that distinction and glory. Your fame is secure. But the bank account? Can we protect ourselves against pirating? Can the Bathtub Combine avoid in any way, shape or manner, being forced to treat with the owners of the Bedelle Foot Regulator? That 's what I must carefully consider. Gentlemen, one week from today I promise you my answer."

"Then you *will* take it up, Doc?"

"If everything is all right we incorporate Bedelle, patent the foot regulator, organize a stock company, and I shall accept the posts of President and Treasurer, with fifty-one per cent of the stock."

"Fifty-one per cent, Doc!"

"My invariable terms. The responsibility and the control must be mine. I don't ask fifty-two per cent, or fifty-three per cent. I ask only protection. Take it or leave it."

Skippy gazed at Snorky, who pondered a long while, but Macnooder's professional manner sunk deep into their imaginations.

"You don't trust us!" said Skippy sorrowfully.

"Business is business!" said Doc, pointing

to the documents he had signed. "Did you trust me?"

"I sort of expected we'd all go cahoots," said Skippy reluctantly.

"Fifty-one per cent, gentlemen, or good day," said Macnooder pompously.

"Take it," said Snorky.

Skippy drew a long breath. It had been a day of disillusions. What millions had slipped away! Truly the lot of the inventor was hard!

"Well?" said Macnooder, rising and shooting his cuffs. "Is it or is it not?"

"It is," said Skippy heavily.

"And now, gentlemen," said Macnooder briskly, "I make no promises. I shall examine the scheme ruthlessly, without sentiment or prejudice — but perhaps, likewise who knows! — Gentlemen, your hands, this moment may be historic!"

Caught by the sudden inspiration of how history might some day look back to these humble beginnings, with a common gesture they rose and clasped hands.

CHAPTER VII

Tragedy

BEDELLE, Incorporated! John C. Bedelle, The Bathtub King! For a delicious week Skippy sailed into the future on the magic carpet of his imagination. He dreamed through the long dull hours of recitations; he dreamed when huddled in sweater he watched the scurrying of the baseball candidates; he dreamed over the prunes at breakfast and the prune whip at night, and in his soft and delicious bed he lay awake for hours planning out the disposal of his future wealth.

The week ended, as all weeks must. At precisely five o'clock in the afternoon, with that fine sense of ceremony that was his, Doc Macnooder knocked at the door and entered.

"Well!" said Snorky Green and Skippy in joyful chorus.

"Your hats and follow me!" said Macnooder in his best Dramatic Club manner.

The tone sent a chill down their backs. Silently, already prepared for the great catastrophe, they filed across the campus, to the Upper House. Not a word had been spoken.

"We will now proceed to examine the Fourth Form baths," said Macnooder, in the same lugubrious voice.

Utterly and instinctively without hope Skippy clutched his roommate's arm and stumbled down the stairs. Something was coming, something that meant the end of all! Macnooder, entering the first bathhouse, flung back the door and pointed to the bathtub.

"Mr. Bedelle, there is your answer!"

"Jerusalem, the faucets are in the middle!" said Snorky, recoiling with a gasp.

"The Bathtub Combine has us beat!" said Macnooder. "If we patented the Foot Regulator every bathtub in the country will have the spigot fastened in the middle."

"Why in Sam Hill did n't you think of that?" said Snorky, turning indignantly on the inventor. He kicked at the offending tub, scowled at Skippy and deserted on the spot.

"And this is the friend I 'd have made a millionaire!" said Skippy to himself in the bitterness of his trial.

"You see, Bo?" said Macnooder, descending from his pedestal, as he perceived how the revelation had crushed the younger imagination.

"I see, Doc."

"It 's no use, is it?"

"No,—damn 'em, they 've got us beat!"

"Now, old sport," said Macnooder kindly, "don't mope about it. Your ideas are all right and I 'm here to keep you practical. Better luck next time, but be sure and come to me."

"Thank you, Doc," said Skippy, through

whose dimmed eyes the fatal bathtub seemed to advance like a juggernaut. He escaped and went dizzily across the Campus and sat on the steps of Memorial Hall, gazing out gloomily at the dotted recreation fields. The great Bedelle gymnasium, which but yesterday was outlined in splendor against the sky, was now cinders and dust, Fifth Avenue further off than Africa, and as for Lillian Russell —

"Looking all over for you, Skippy," said a familiar voice.

Before him stood Toots Cortrelle.

"Oh, it 's you," he said heavily.

"Are you flush? I thought if you were — that quarter you know — you said —"

"I said I should remember," said Skippy, with a hollow laugh. There was just twenty cents in his pockets that an hour ago had been heavy with millions. He drew out two dimes and tendered them.

"Here 's the best I can do, Toots. I 'll try to get that other nickel to you to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII

When Friends Prove False

COMMONPLACE minds are crushed by defeat; great imaginations rise to profit. Ten days after Skippy Bedelle had seen the gilded fabric of his future greatness collapse with the failure of the Foot Regulator to revolutionize the bathtub industry the spirit of invention had risen triumphantly from the ashes of first disillusionment. After all, there were other services to render to humanity, and the mind that at the age of fifteen could have reasoned so brilliantly in theory must inevitably express itself with profit to the race and to his own individual bank account.

At first Skippy's depression had been profound, and as the sensation was new he enjoyed its sensual charm to the fullest. He discarded the jaunty cap for a slouch hat which he pulled down over his eyes; he selected the soberest of neckwear, turned up his collar, sank his fists in his pockets, and spent solitary afternoons among the ruins of the Carthage of his imagination, seated on the site of what would never be the John C. Bedelle Gymnasium. Even the spectacle of Cap Keafer knocking out a home run in the ninth inning brought him no rapturous exultation. He was akin to *Ivanhoe*,

the disinherited knight, and *Athos* of the brooding sorrows. The world had receded from him, and nobody cared or noticed. He was alone, misunderstood, without a friend in the world. For after what had happened he could never again feel the same towards that basest of ingrates, Snorky Green.

The evening after the collapse of the Bedelle Foot Regulator, Incorporated, there had been a short and exceedingly painful interview.

"Well, Skippy, old top," said Snorky, who was genuinely contrite and ready to make the advance, "that certainly was hard luck. I feel just as bad as—" Here he stopped before the sudden majestic indignation which confronted him.

"Green!" said Skippy, frowning.

"Oh, I say—"

"Green, when you thought I was going to be a rich man," continued Skippy icily, "there was nothing you would n't do for me. You fawned on me. But when I had to face defeat —at the first test—you deserted me with sneers and gibes. That is not friendship. Green, you are not capable of true friendship, and you have proved it. I shall never forget and I shall never forgive!"

"Oh, shucks, Skippy!" said Snorky. "What 's the use of rubbin' it in? I 'm not as bad as all that!"

"Green," said Skippy, working himself into the scene which he had rehearsed a dozen times as he had long debated whether to address the offender as Mr. Green, "Green, we will have to go on rooming together but I wish you to understand that nothing you can ever do or say will change my feelings now towards you. Nothing! Whatever communication is necessary from now on between us, will be in *writing*—"

"What 's that?"

"In writing," said Skippy firmly.

"Oh, well, if that 's the way you 're going to take it you can go to blazes!" said Snorky wrathfully. "But before you climb on your high horse, suppose you restore my red choker tie, my agate cuff buttons, my silver-rimmed fountain pen and a few pairs of fancy socks—"

"*This* is unworthy of even you," said Skippy, who rose and with a perfect social manner took the articles in question from the bureau on the south side of the room and gingerly placed them on the bureau in the western corner. "The socks are in the wash. I prefer to return them as I received them." After which he disrobed and, somewhat consoled, watched from the coverlets the indignant and bewildered Snorky Green sitting on his bedside, halfway out of his trousers, glaring at him in rage.

For a week, a miserable, lonely week, Skippy held to this irreconcilable attitude. During

this time he touched the bottom of depression —he even doubted himself! Would he ever invent anything again? Had it been just a flash in the pan? Was it all a false start? What had become of the imagination which had blazed up so brilliantly? Perhaps after all he was no different from the rest—just an average mind fit only for such vulgar things as banking and trade. Then one morning through the gloom clouds a sudden shaft of sunlight arrived. He had another idea!

He had been lolling deliciously in bed, disdaining to notice the first harsh summons to rise, and his mind had dwelt enviously on the brilliant figure of Doc Macnooder. After all, even Doc Macnooder had his failures. There was the matter of the Folding Toothbrush, which all Macnooder's eloquence had failed to market with Bill Appleby.

"Jingo! That certainly was a bum idea," he said to himself, somewhat comforted. "You might do something with a toothbrush, but a folding one is a joke!"

All at once he sprang out of bed and, reaching the washstand in a bound, seized the nearest tooth mug. Snorky, who, despite the present unpleasantness, still trusted his rising instincts, catapulted out of bed and arrived three seconds later at his side of the washstand, where through still foggy eyes he beheld Skippy

gazing at a toothbrush which he held reverently before him as a jeweler examines a named stone.

"What the deuce?"

"Dinged if I haven't got Macnooder beat a mile!" exclaimed Skippy, who in the first exhilaration of discovery had completely forgotten the correspondence acquaintanceship he had imposed.

"It 's about a toothbrush!" said Snorky with great intelligence.

"You bet it 's about a toothbrush." But here Skippy suddenly remembered, and the smile gave place to a frown.

"Oh, I say, Skippy! Let 's call it off," said Snorky in a rush of feeling. "It was dead rotten of me and I 'm doggone sorry — honest, I am — but you 've rubbed it in enough."

"Very well, I forgive you and I shall try to forget," said Skippy, who also had chafed under the long silence.

"What 's the great idea?" said Snorky hurriedly.

"The great idea is a *Souvenir* Toothbrush," said Skippy proudly.

The idea did not reach Snorky immediately, but he was too diplomatic to show his disappointment, so he said humbly:

"I suppose it 's because I 'm a dumb-head, but why a souvenir toothbrush?"

"Why a souvenir pillow-case? Why a souvenir buttonhook or a souvenir bootjack or a footstool, necktie, lap robe, or anything souvenir?"

"All right, why?" said Snorky, who felt hurt at this assumption of intellectual superiority.

"The bootjack does n't make the souvenir; it 's the souvenir makes the bootjack, does n't it?" said Skippy, who was thinking deeply.

Snorky had never heard of the Socratian method, but he was impressed; so not understanding, he nodded and answered:

"Aha, I see!"

"It 's the thing you souvenir that 's important. If you want to remember you can't remember too often."

"No-o."

"And how can you remember better than the first crack out of bed—"

"I get all that," said Snorky, acknowledging the brilliancy of the argument. "But how the dickens can you make a souvenir out of a toothbrush?"

"My boy—my boy!" said Skippy with crushing contempt. "Have you no imagination? A souvenir toothbrush? Why, easy! Make the handle in the shape of a baseball bat and put the Lawrenceville-Andover score on the back—red and black."

"Well, I 'll be jiggswiggered!"

"You can make 'em in the form of a riding crop for racing sports, masts for yachtsmen, sword-blades for the army. Why, it 's a cinch! You can have Lawrenceville shields on the back, Princeton colors, Yale colors. You can do anything, anything with the idea — you can have your best girl's initials, or you can have her photograph stenciled on!"

"Sure thing! Why not Mother or Auntie — 'when this you see remember to use me!' " said Snorky, who feared where another flight of the imagination might transport his roommate.

"Green!" said Skippy, flaring up at this destructive levity; but before he could deliver his broadside the breakfast gong began to rock the house and simultaneously each head ducked into a waiting basin.

When Skippy during the relaxation of the morning recitations considered the Souvenir Toothbrush he was not so favorably impressed. Snorky's suggestion somehow threw a touch of ridicule over the whole proposition and Skippy, like all true imaginations, shrank from ridicule. Undoubtedly if the Souvenir Toothbrush became a fact, mothers and governesses *would* abuse its opportunities. Think of a parental eye gazing admonishingly at you from the back of a toothbrush every morning! Why, the name of Bedelle might become an execration! He saw himself pilloried among the oppressors of boy-

kind, as unpopular as the compiler of a Latin grammar or the accursed Euclid! No, the idea was unthinkable! Skippy did not reject the Souvenir Toothbrush *in toto*. He bought a blank book on which he inscribed:

INVENTIONS
JOHN C. BEDELLE
1896

On the first page under the day of the month he wrote a full description, adding:

FIELD LIMITED
Suggestion — Hold until later date and patent anonymously.

Skippy then reluctantly admitted the destructive force of Snorky Green's criticism of the Souvenir Toothbrush; he admitted it, but he could not forgive him for being right. There are certain things which one does not forgive a brother, a sister, or the chum of chums.

After all, was Snorky Green worthy of that privileged and exalted position? A disturbing doubt began to creep into Skippy's imagination. He passed over the treachery in the matter of the now defunct Bedelle Foot Regulator; that might conceivably have been the fault of an inferior temperament. It was the spirit of negative criticism, the settled habit of turning into raillery the fragile first impulses of his inventive imagination, that was alarming.

"Gee! If every time I get a big idea, he 's

going to knock it in the head, what 's the use of having an imagination?'' he said gloomily.

After all, could a creative temperament yoke itself to a destructive criticism without self-immolation? Immersed in these brooding forebodings, he came heavily up the Dickinson stairs to the communal room. Suddenly he stopped, amazed.

''What the deuce!''

On his bureau a flaming bit of color greeted him from the somber mass of his pendent neckties. He advanced and recognized Snorky Green's red choker tie, which was particularly dear to his young sartorial fancy. On the pin cushion lay the agate cuff buttons and the silver-rimmed fountain pen. He opened the top drawer and beheld three pair of open-work socks, red, orange and glowing green.

''Gee, how crude!'' he said indignantly.

At another moment and in another mood his heart might have softened at this evident peace-offering; but this afternoon, with the new child of his imagination slain by Snorky Green's brutal wit, the whole proceeding was undeniably crude, a bribe too openly offered. He would have to return them; that was inevitable and that was of course the last thing he wished to do. He sat down at his desk, scowling horribly, and then, moved by a fitting inspiration, he seized his pen and dashed off the most frigid and properly insulting of notes.

To Arthur E. Green. Goods Returned.
1 Fountain Pen.
1 Pair of Agate Cuff Buttons.
1 Choker Tie (red).
3 Pair of Socks.
Kindly acknowledge receipt,
Bedelle.

The last he considered such a master stroke that, his good humor restored by the anticipation of the infuriating effect on his beloved friend, he began to whistle a triumphant strain. He made a neat package, pinned the ultimatum on it, and proceeded to the opposite bureau.

"Well, I 'll be teetotally jiggswiggered," he said, astounded.

In the oval of the glass, a new photograph had appeared in the company of the three other smiling feminine beauties which Snorky Green, as a man of the world, displayed by implied right of conquest. Skippy set down his package and craned forward for a closer examination.

"Huh! Old enough to be his grandmother," he said contemptuously, staring at the new victim of Snorky Green's charms.

But at this moment, hearing a familiar step in the hall, he bounded back in time to assume a nonchalant, bored attitude as Snorky came joyfully in, exclaiming:

"Hello, old sporting life! What do you know to-day?"

"Green," said Skippy, drawing himself up and extending an elocutionary finger towards

the bureau, "you will find something to interest you there."

He waited a moment outside in the hall until Snorky's bursting imprecation brought the needed consolation, and then tripped down the steps, seeking a calming jigger.

CHAPTER IX

Snorky as a Lady-Killer

L'AMOUR a des raisons que la raison connait pas," say the French, who ought to know, and the first expansive sentimental affection of a boy for a chum has also its illogical quality. Now, Skippy adored Snorky and the affection was returned. He felt that Snorky would die for him, as of course he would lay down his own life for his friend, if they should ever hunt together in African jungles. He was willing to share Snorky's last dime, keep his confidences, and fight shoulder to shoulder. He admired, he respected, he loved Snorky, but for the life of him he could not see wherein Snorky Green's peculiar brand of beauty should appeal to the young feminine eye any more than his own lank frame and sharpened features. Why should Snorky's glass present four lovely and adoring feminine faces, while his own should give back only a pointed nose around which the orange freckles swarmed like flies? True, the lady-killer's wardrobe was of a magnificence which outshone his, but then socks and neckties and cuff-button jewelry are communal possessions.

Why should Snorky Green then inspire such

passions while he passed lonely and unloved? No, certainly Snorky was not beautiful. He had a smudgy, stubby little nose. He was lop-eared and the dank yellow hair fell about his puffy eyes in straight, unrippling shocks. Yet four women (three blondes and a brunette) watched with affectionate glances the progress of his casual morning toilette. Why?

The next morning, as Skippy reluctantly rose and gazed upon the feminine galaxy waiting at the bureau that was not his, the sense of his own inferiority again smote him. Envy is the corrupting cancer of friendship. He did like Snorky. He yearned for the life-and-death devotion of a chum of chums; a sort of Damon and Pythias, D'Artagnan and Athos affair—but, while this sense of inferiority continued, the shadow was over the fair sunlit landscape of impulsive friendship. It was so, and the feeling would not down.

That evening, being alone, he stood again contemplating the evidence of Snorky Green's predatory progress among the ladies. He examined the four photographs carefully.

"They can't all be sisters," he said gloomily; besides, he knew that his roommate, more fortunate than he, had to bear but one such cross. "Danged if I can see what gets them. If that fellow 's a lady charmer, I 'll hire out for a matinée idol!"

On the pin cushion was a pin in the shape of

an arrow (an arrow of course suggested a transpierced heart), which Snorky wore for important ceremonies, when he donned a perpendicular collar and a white coaching tie. On the wall was a Farmington banner and on the sofa five pillows worked by loving feminine hands.

"Sisters never go to that trouble," said Skippy, secure in his knowledge of sister nature. "By the great horned spoon this can't go on. I 've either got to lick the stuffin's out of him or—"

Without finishing his phrase, he went to the table, drew forth Cæsar's "Gallic Wars," and a copy of "Lorna Doone" and immediately began to concentrate. A moment later Snorky Green arrived chuckling from a foray down the hall where he had just deposited a moth ball in the lamp chimney of Beckstein, the Midnight Poler. He came in rollicking and triumphant, slamming and locking the door against a sudden reprisal. Then, seeing Skippy, he stiffened, scowled, and assumed an air of frigid dignity. Skippy, with his eye on a convenient mirror, followed his movements expectantly.

Snorky, having glared sufficiently at the unresponsive back of his roommate, planted himself in front of him and said angrily:

"Say, what in tarnation is biting you, anyhow?"

Part of the pleasure which Skippy derived from his periodic application of ostracism was in the immediate success it achieved on his roommate's impressionable temperament. At present, being in an exceedingly grouchy mood, he drew forth a pad and pencil and tendered them with a plain intimation that only thus would he receive any communications.

"What are you sore about?" said Snorky, flaring up at once. "Just because I took a crack at your old Souvenir Toothbrush? Is that it?"

Skippy drew forth a handy literal translation and ostensibly began to apply it to the baffling text.

"My lord, you act like a sick girl! You 're a pleasant roommate, you are! How long are you going to sulk like this?"

Skippy began to whistle softly to himself:

> "You can't play in my backyard;
> I don't love you any more."

Whereupon Snorky, having slammed a book on the table, advanced with doubled fists, exclaiming:

" You stop that, do you hear! You stop that or — or — I 'll — "

Skippy, whose calm was delightfully reinforced by this show of temper, again, but without looking up, indicated the pad and pencil.

" I can lick you! " said Snorky hoarsely.

This was too much. Skippy sprang up, fists

ready, and glowered his defiance. For a long moment they held this bellicose attitude, a collision imminent. But a resort to primitive methods is a serious affair between roommates. Each hesitated, seeking a dignified evasion of the crisis.

"Well, go on with your baby act, if you enjoy it," said Snorky scornfully. "Lord, I 'd hate to have your disposition!"

The status quo having been restored, Skippy discarded Cæsar's "Gallic Perplexities" and returned to boyhood's first heroine, while Snorky in a rage retreated to his side of the room and pondered.

"I certainly riled him that time," said Skippy joyfully to himself. "Wonder what he 'll do now?"

After a few moments Snorky began to whistle, meditating to himself, which in boyhood is always a signal that the imagination is working.

"What 's the big idea now?" said Skippy, following from the corner of his eye.

Snorky rose briskly and, repairing to his closet, disappeared on all fours. A moment later he returned, with a box of large and juicy chocolate éclairs and a bottle of ginger pop, and, establishing himself at the opposite end of the table, began to enjoy himself audibly.

"The low-down hound!" said Skippy, writhing on his seat.

In his calculations, he had completely forgotten the purchase of the afternoon. In turn he rose, delved into the débris of his closet and, returning, spread before his end of the table one tin of deviled turkey (Snorky's favorite), a large piece of American cheese and a bottle of root beer.

It had now become a battle of wits, with each resolved to impress the other with the delicious satisfaction that he was experiencing and each gazing from time to time at a point directly above the other's head. There were six éclairs. Snorky ate four rapidly, licking his fingers with gusto after each.

Then he ate the fifth éclair more slowly and with some effort. Despite all his self-control Skippy's gaze could not turn from that last-surviving member of the chocolate family. He was suffering tortures, but suffering under a calm and smiling exterior.

"Hello!" said Snorky suddenly, talking to himself. "I almost forgot."

He rose and left the room to Skippy and the sixth éclair. Tantalus, amid his parched seeking of a cooling draught, never suffered more anguish than Skippy sitting there before that undefended éclair, with only a gesture intervening.

"Of all the mean, dirty, contemptible tricks!" he said angrily between his teeth, revolting at this most treacherous trap. For he must not,

he could not, no matter what the pain he must endure, admit defeat by falling on that éclair. He rose and went to the window. Certainly he had been mistaken in Snorky; no one who would carry a quarrel to such fiendish lengths had the largeness of spirit that he had the right to demand in a chum.

When Snorky returned, he glanced in some surprise at the untouched éclair. Then he lifted it gingerly, examined it closely to see if it contained any foreign corrupting matter, and, his appetite restored by the lapse of time, ate it with smacking relish.

Skippy, crouched in his chair, ground his teeth and tried to shut out the tantalizing sounds. Snorky began to hum gaily to himself. Then, proceeding across the direct line of his roommate's vision, he took up the latest photograph and contemplated it with a little exaggerated rapture. It was the last straw. Skippy's rage burst forth in a loud and insulting guffaw.

"Ha, ha!"

Snorky, to whom the advantage of the situation was now apparent, took up each photograph in turn and smiled with the pardonable pride of one who knows his own worth.

The next moment two books went flying across the room, and Skippy, now thoroughly infuriated, stood before him, arms akimbo, a sneer on his disgusted lips.

"Don't let me stop you. Go on, kiss it, fondle it. Put it under your pillow and hug it, you great big mooncalf! Say, why do you come to Lawrenceville, anyhow? Why don't you go to Ogontz or Dobbs Ferry?"

Then Snorky, tasting the sweets of revenge, went to the table and, picking up the pad and pencil, presented them to Skippy with a mocking bow.

Skippy's reply is not to be found even in the most up-to-date dictionaries. Furious at his roommate, the world in general, and himself most of all, he shed his clothes and dived into bed.

"Girls — faugh!" he exclaimed in disgust. And, pulling the covers over his head, he retired to his own ruminations.

CHAPTER X

Love Lightly Considered

TO understand what Skippy felt one must have known the springs of boyhood's impulse towards perfect manhood.

To Skippy a man was that completed being, who wore trousers that never bagged at the knees, neckties that never slipped below the collar button, who displayed a gold watch-chain across a fancy vest, from whose lower lip a cigarette was pendent, who possessed a latch-key and the right to read far into the night, and who shaved once a day. The sentimental complications had escaped him. Whatever attracted man to the frizzled, giggling, smirking, smiling bipeds in shirts remained a mystery to Skippy.

All at once he had to face this problem. He had gone resolutely up the steps towards perfect manhood. He had learned the art of pressing trousers to a thin razor-edge from Snorky, who was a year his senior in boarding-school knowledge.

The necktie question was not yet settled, though every morning he subjected his throat to a strangle-hold.

He had bought a razor and twice a week, trembling and apprehensive, drew it across his

maidenly cheek. He slashed himself fearfully but he did not mind that. He wore his scars proudly, a warning to all that adolescence was on him, as the young Heidelberg student flaunts his wounds.

The cigarette (known as the Demon Cigarette, the Filthy Weed, and the Coffin Nail) had been a dreadful struggle. But he had won out.

He loathed the Demon Cigarette as he abhorred tobacco in any form, but he had martyrized himself until he was able to puff up the cold-air flue in the stilly reaches of the night without having to grope his way back to the bed and watch the room careen about him. He did not inhale, but he had learned to imitate the process so as to defy detection, as he exclaimed:

"Gee! It 's good to fill the old lungs, is n't it?"

These things, by dint of concentration and courage, Skippy had achieved, not to stand ashamed in the eyes of his roommate. And, having with pain and perseverance traveled this far, he suddenly, this night, realized how much was still lacking.

Yes, there was certainly something lacking in his progress towards perfect manhood, something that Snorky had and he had not.

It was all very well to be a man, to smoke, to shave, and to have acquired the sartorial evi-

dence. This was all very well — but others must perceive it, too! This was the point. As Snorky had done, he must do.

The new world to conquer was the feminine heart.

Now, Skippy had not at this moment the slightest inclination towards the lovelier sex.

He did not aspire to be a Don Juan or a Beau Brummel, but if he were to continue to room with Snorky Green he must acquire at least the appearance. He perceived this. It pained him that in the scheme of things it should be so — but a reputation he must have.

"Girls, girls! Lord, how I loathe them!" he said in a last farewell to his male independence. "What I think of a fellow who hangs around them, wears their rings and pins and carries off their handkerchiefs! But I 'll be danged if I can stand any more of this conquering-hero stuff from that eyesore across the room! If it 's got to be done, you bet I 'll do it! I 'll put it over that four-flusher, if I have to fuss every girl in Scranton!"

CHAPTER XI

The Demon of Jealousy

THE Easter vacation was ended and four hundred overfed, underslept boys had returned to spread the germs of measles, mumps and tonsilitis among their fellows. Skippy and Snorky, having fallen hilariously into each other's arms, were proceeding with the important ceremony of the unpacking, while surveying each other with a critical eye.

"Seems to me you look quite spruced up," said Snorky when, to be more at his ease, Skippy had shed his coat and stood revealed in all the splendor of a flaming-yellow buckskin vest, with gleaming brass buttons; then noting the display of jewelry in the red and yellow tie, he added: "Where did you get the fancy stuff?"

Skippy removed his scarf-pin and gazed languidly at the delicate garland of forget-me-nots. Then he yawned and said:

"I 'll tell you about her some day."

Snorky sat down on his best derby. "My aunt's cat's pants! Have I lived to see it?"

"See what?" said Skippy loftily.

"You a fusser! Skippy Bedelle wearing a girl's pin! Fan me quick!"

"Just because I have n't boasted about my conquests—" said Skippy, and he brought forth a little bundle carefully wrapped in a green bandanna handkerchief.

"What 's that?" said Snorky faintly.

From beneath the protecting folds of the handkerchief appeared a white satin frame with hand-painted violets rampant. Out of the violets gazed an adoring pair of eyes.

"Is that her?" said Snorky.

"Lord, no! This is only Margot," said Skippy, who inhaled the fragrance and offered the same opportunity to his chum. "Rather delicate, eh, what?"

"Smells like patchouli," said Snorky, beginning to recover.

"Patchouli? Margot? Say, what kind of females do you play around with? My girls drive their own four-in-hands and wear pearls for breakfast."

"Oh, ex-cuse me!" said Snorky with a mocking courtesy.

Skippy brought forth a second photograph and placed it on the bureau, and then a third. Snorky, who had begun to sulk, feigned indifference and proceeded to range *his* trophies on the bureau.

"This 'll cheer up the window seat a bit," said Skippy in the same casual tone.

Snorky's head appeared above the trunk long enough to watch Skippy with his arms full of

pillows, lace and sweet-scented, scatter them with a nonchalant gesture. But when, continuing his manœuvres, Skippy in the new revelation produced three banners emblazoned with the insignia of feminine schools, Snorky capitulated to his curiosity and, advancing to the bureau, stood in open-mouthed wonder.

"I 'll be jiggswiggered! Holy cats and Aunt Jemima! I never would have believed it!"

Skippy brought out a fan, spread it, and pinned it affectionately above the photograph gallery.

"I guess that 'll hold him," he said to himself. "Poor old Snorky! I hope his heart is strong enough."

"Been doing quite a bit of fussing yourself," said Snorky with a new respect. "Why didn't you ever tell a fellow?"

"I never discuss women," said Skippy, dusting off the fourth photograph.

"You must have gone the pace," said Snorky in wonder.

"Oh, I looked them over quite a bit."

"But, my lord, Skippy! You can't have loved all of them?"

"Just collecting souvenirs."

As a crowning touch, a climax long imagined, plotted and hilariously enjoyed in prospect, he next produced, before the bewildered eyes of Snorky Green, what in school-day parlance is

known as a Trophy of Trophies; an incredible, amazing, inexplicable thing, a tasseled, beribboned, pink and white bed cap! Snorky made a feeble gesture or two and then lay down to signify that the shock had killed him.

"Skippy! What does that mean?"

"This also is a thing I cannot discuss," said Skippy, whose fondest imaginings were outdone by reality.

"Any more?" said Snorky, struggling weakly upward.

"That 's all," said Skippy, who was gazing contentedly at the imposing collection. But all at once he reflected: "Hello, where in the deuce did I put her?"

He pretended to search through his trunk and valise in great concern until, Snorky's curiosity having been properly awakened, he suddenly struck his forehead.

"Of course. How silly of me!"

And diving into his inner pocket he brought forth a last tribute, encased in neat pink morocco, which he arranged in the unmistakable position of honor.

Snorky approached on tenterhooks. The next moment he burst out: "Mimi!"

"What, you know her?" said Skippy, surprised in turn. "Rather cute little thing."

"Look!"

On Snorky's bureau in the same place of honor was an identical photograph, a little Jap-

anese brunette, with a descending puff and an ascending nose. They stood staring at each other, and the temperature of the room seemed to recede towards the freezing point.

"When did you meet her? How long have you known her, and how the deuce did you get her photo?" said Snorky, with blazing eyes.

Skippy was in a quandary. A false step might tumble about him the glorious fabric of his new reputation. He went to his bureau and thoughtfully considered the pink morocco case stolen from his sister's collection. Revenge had been sweet, yet the impulse was still on him. He decided that a quick conquest would be the more galling to a rival's pride.

"Oh, we waltzed about a bit, but I gave her an awful rush."

Snorky went and sat down in a corner, elbows on his knees, his chin in his hands. Seeing thus the wreck he had caused, Skippy began to be troubled by his conscience. Suppose it really was a serious affair. Wouldn't it be nobler to surrender the fictitious conquest to his beloved friend, to adopt a sacrificial attitude and allow Snorky to go in and win her?

"I say, old boy, I 'm awfully sorry; do you really care?"

"For Mimi Lafontaine? For a girl that can't tell a man from a cabbage? Ha, ha!"

All kindly feelings vanished.

"What 's the good of calling yourself names?" said Skippy crushingly. He picked up the photograph and smiled at it. "Mimi is a flirt, but she has her good points."

"Look here!" said Snorky, rising in sudden fury. "There 's one question has got to be answered right now."

"And pray what is that?" said Skippy, resting one elbow on the top of the bed and crossing his legs to show his perfect calm.

Snorky planted himself before the bureau and extended his hand in a furious gesture towards the lace bed cap that now adorned the top.

"Does or does not *that* belong to Miss Lafontaine?"

"Any one who would lower himself to ask such a question," said Skippy, still in a stage attitude, "does not deserve my sympathy. I would have given her up. Now I shall keep her."

"Oh, you think she cares for you, you chump?"

"I do not discuss women."

The gauntlet had been thrown down and the demon of jealousy took up his abode with the *ménage* Bedelle and Green. For a week the comedy continued, while conversation was reduced to a minimum and transmitted in writing along the lines of Skippy's imagining. Each watched the other's correspondence with a

jealous eye. Whenever Skippy received a letter from home, he ostensibly hugged it to his shirt-front and, repairing to a corner, read it furtively with the pink morocco case before him. Afterward he would execute a double shuffle across the room, whistle a hilarious strain, and give every facial contortion which could express a lover's joy, while Snorky squirmed and scowled and pretended not to notice. Snorky in turn retaliated by writing long letters after hours by the light of a single candle, ruffling up his hair and breathing audibly. In the morning Skippy, passing towards the wash-stand, would see on the table a swollen envelope, addressed:

Miss Mimi Lafontaine,
Farmington,
Conn.

These letters troubled him. When a fellow could write over four pages it certainly must be serious, and these looked as though they held forty. The trouble was that Skippy had begun to believe in his own passion. The little Japanese brunette had become a reality to him. He had talked with her, walked with her, received the avowal of her own uncontrollable impulse towards him. In fact, at times he almost believed that he had actually held her in his arms and whirled in the dizzy intoxication of the waltzes he had announced. He even was able to feel a real pang of jealousy, a fierce and

contending antagonism against Snorky, who actually knew her. Such a situation was of course fraught with too many explosive possibilities to long endure. Fortunately Fate stepped in and preserved the friendship.

CHAPTER XII

All 's Well That Ends Well

A WEEK after these events, returning on a Saturday morning from the last vexations of the curriculum with the expectant thrill of the opening of the baseball season, Skippy was amazed to receive, by the hands of Klondike, the colored sweep, a scribbled note in the familiar handwriting of his sister:

Dear Jack:

Miss Green and I and a party of girls are down for the game. We 're at the Lodge. Come right over and bring Arthur.

Sis.

His first emotion was one of horror; had they been up to the room, and was his duplicity forever at the mercy of a sister's gibes? Klondike reassured him. He bounded upstairs, made a hasty survey, found everything in order, and hastily departed for the Lodge, after a quick plunge into the glorious buckskin vest, a struggle into a clean collar and a hurried dusting off of his shoes against the window seat. He reached the parlors of the Lodge on the heels of Snorky Green, who, being as thoroughly bored by the prospect as he, forgot the week's feud in a common misery."

"Gee! Are n't sisters the limit?"

"Well, we 're in for it."

"Let 's hope they clear out before dinner."

The next moment Skippy was perfunctorily pecking at the cheek of Miss Clara Bedelle and pretending to be overjoyed at the prospect of parading before the assembled school with six young ladies in tow. Then he looked up and something like a cataleptic fit went through his body.

Directly in front of him, evidently waiting for the introduction, was unmistakably Miss Mimi Lafontaine! He looked at Snorky and saw the same expression of horror over his pudgy features, as he came up, knees shaking, to be introduced in turn.

Then to Snorky's distressed soul came the welcome sound:

"Jack, dear, I want you to meet Mimi — Miss Lafontaine."

To the amazement of sisters and friends, said Snorky, advancing with outstretched hand:

"Hello, you old Skippy!"

Skippy clung to it as to a spar in midstream.

"Snorky, old dear — it 's all right."

"It is?"

"You bet it is!"

"What are you idiotic boys doing?" said Sister Green.

"Shall we tell?" asked Snorky roguishly.

"Women have no sense of humor," said Skippy, grinning with a great easement of the soul.

At this moment they rose above the vexations of the female intrusion. They looked at each other and each comprehended the other. They were equals, equal in imagination, in audacity and expedient. This mutual revelation cleared away all past misunderstanding and jealousies. The sense of humor was triumphant. They loved each other.

A half-hour later, having, to the utter amazement of sister No. 1 and sister No. 2, rolled hilariously, arms locked, across the campus, they lay on opposite beds, struggling weakly to master the pangs of laughter which smote them like the colic.

"Are we going to tell our real names?" said Skippy at last.

"Let 's."

"You know, Bo, you certainly had me going —you certainly did. And all these months, too! Snorky, I bow before you."

"Allow me," said Snorky admiringly.

"Say! You 're all right, but honest now," said Skippy, pointing to Snorky's bureau and the feminine galaxy, "honest, who are they?"

"Well, of course one 's my sister," said Snorky, grinning. "I swiped these three and I bought the other with the frame. Say, I 'm not worried about how you got yours, but what I 'd like to know is, who in tarnation belongs to that boudoir cap?"

"My grandmother, and she 's a corker, too!"

They clasped hands and Snorky announced solemnly:

"Skippy, old fellow, let 'em have all their old skirts; there 's nothing like the real thing, the man-to-man stuff, is there?"

"You bet there isn't."

"And say, I 'm sorry about that souvenir toothbrush, honest I am, and I think you 're a wonder, I do."

"Oh, that 's all right. That 's all right," said Skippy, embarrassed. "There 's a lot of money in it, but I guess I prefer to make my pile in other ways."

CHAPTER XIII

A Woman of the World

NOW that the Snorky-Skippy friendship had been placed on the firm rock of mutual revelation and all unfounded jealousies swept away by frank confession, Skippy's imagination returned to the real purpose of life. He was a little ashamed of the time wasted on the opposite sex, even if for a worthy purpose. Such frailties were all very well for Shrimp Davis and the Triumphant Egghead, who had legs educated for the ballroom, but he, John C. Bedelle, had other missions to perform in this life which held such short years for a man of imagination.

For several days he sought diligently among the needs of human nature for something on the grand scale. He tried his hand at a perpetual-motion machine. He thought out a combination submarine and airship which would put the navies of the world at the mercy of his country. He even descended to such trivial abstractions as a Reversible Shirt-Front, which took its due place in the book of inventions under the following entry:

REVERSIBLE SHIRT-FRONT

Argument: Admitted that Reversible Shirt-Fronts are easy to manufacture; what demand would there

be for them? Could they be popularized among the working classes? Treat cuffs same way.

For certain reasons he decided not to discuss this last invention with Snorky Green. These tentative efforts were but exercising his imagination. He knew it and waited breathlessly.

But at last, a month after the failure of the Foot-Regulator, the long-awaited thrill arrived, the thrill which comes only with the possession of a Universal Idea, and for the first time in his long, untroubled fifteen years, it arrived in conjunction with the intrusion into his still simple scheme of things of that arch-disturber — WOMAN.

Miss Virginia Dabtree was not destined to occupy the proud place of the first love, though Miss Dabtree (who was Snorky Green's aunt) was eminently equipped for such a position, being eighteen years his senior and at an age when by instinct, habit, and a need of self-encouragement, any tribute from the opposite sex, no matter how given, caused her not the slightest irritation.

Skippy, however, was too completely dazzled by the consummate artistry of Miss Dabtree's clinging toilettes, the built-up luxuriousness of her hair, the pink and white complexion, the stenciled eyebrows, and the Lady Vere de Vere attitudes to dare to entertain a personal hope.

He was dazzled, dumfounded! A new world opened to him. Through her at last he per-

ceived woman, her place in the now more complex scheme of things, the influence she could exert, the stimulus to the imagination, and the answer to his need of some guiding purpose.

True, Miss Dabtree's age was her protection. She was removed from even the flights of his imagination, yet the influence she exerted all unwittingly over his life was inestimable. For it was for her, to protect her, that he, Skippy Bedelle, conceived his magnum opus, the Mosquito-Proof Socks.

The hour was eight, the day Sunday, the time the first clear week in June. They sat together on the porch of the Kennedy, listening to the sound of the Upper House singing rising clearly above the twang of banjos across the campus from the esplanade.

The long twilight had set in, yet the afterglow hung brilliantly about them. Skippy was balanced gingerly on the front edge of a rocker which swayed perilously under him and added to his general discomfort. There was a safe straight-backed stationary chair only ten feet away, but to save his life he could think of no legitimate excuse for rising and possessing it. If he leaned back the sharp upright collar, borrowed from Dennis de Brian de Boru Finnegan, cut cruelly into his chin, and when he craned forward the red choker tie (restored by Snorky in addition to the agate cuff buttons) bulged

forth in the most disconcerting and unimpressive luxuriance.

"You 've known Snorky, that is, Arthur, a long time, have n't you?" he said desperately, breathing hard.

"Why, you funny boy! I 'm his aunt," said Miss Dabtree, laughing.

"Oh, yes!" He felt he had offended her mortally, so to repair his social blunder he said point-blank: "Gee! Some fellows are born lucky!"

"Now that is sweet of you," she said, giving him the full effect of her heavenly smile. "But I 'm afraid you 're a terrible flatterer."

"Shall I tell her about the Foot Regulator?" thought Skippy, who felt the need of confiding his life's ambition.

But at this moment Destiny arrived in the shape of a mosquito that registered its coming on one of Skippy's open-work socks. Skippy shook his foot uneasily, just enough to disturb the intruder but not enough to attract Miss Dabtree's attention. The mosquito transferred its operations to the other sock. Skippy, in order to conceal his predicament, slowly crossed his legs and then hastily uncrossed them, not being quite sure of the etiquette of such a position.

The mosquito, pursuing its way, lighted on the graceful silver-sheened stocking which Skippy had been contemplating furtively for the last ten minutes with a sudden realization

that the feminine ankle has certain strange sentimental values utterly different from those for which his and Snorky Green's were created.

But immediately a terrible dilemma arose. How was he to act? In another moment the beautiful creature so perfumingly close to him would notice the intruder, might even retreat before the menace of more mosquitoes, and the rapturous twilight opportunity for opening his confidence would pass forever. His instinct was all to protect her. But how? To slap at the insect with his cap or his hand was unthinkable. He found himself blushing at the very thought! Yet how to warn her without acknowledging that his attention had been concentrated on the lower graceful silhouette? He might offend her irreparably. Even if he exclaimed, "Look out, there 's a 'skeeter,' " what would he answer if she in her innocence should ask, "Where?"

As he debated this, hot and cold, the inevitable happened.

"Good gracious!" cried Miss Dabtree with an impetuous lunge towards the point of attack, which made Skippy modestly avert his gaze. "This place is filled with mosquitoes. We never can sit here!"

She rose and led the way to the parlor.

"Won't you come and wait for Arthur?"

"Thanks, thanks awfully; much obliged," said Skippy, gulping down his disappointment.

"Good gracious!" cried Miss Dabtree with an impetuous lunge towards the point of attack. *Page* 78

He tripped against the foot-scraper and made a mess of opening the door for her. He wanted above all things in the world to follow her in and be permitted just for a few more wonderful minutes to sit and gaze at her loveliness. But to admit this was impossible. Whatever happened, she must never suspect, never! So at loss for an excuse he stammered, "I 'd love to, but really I ought to get back for study hour."

A moment later, having backed and scraped down the steps and thanked her profusely for some indefinite thing for which she ought to be thanked, he went rushing around the corner, let himself in by King Lentz's window, and surreptitiously gained his room. At last, having torn off the red choker tie and freed his neck, back once more to the ease of bachelor attire, he returned wrathfully to the pest which had perhaps saved him from his first sentimental excursion.

Sunk in a cushioned armchair, his slippered feet on the desk, a bottle of cooling ginger pop in one hand and a cream puff in the other, he placed before his imagination the problem:

"Why the mosquito?"

The more he pondered the more he became impressed with the fact that here indubitably was one of the errors of the Almighty. Snakes destroyed rats and mice at least, but what earthly purpose was served by mosquitoes?

He knew, as all smatterings of outer informa-

tion reached him via the weekly lecture course, that besides being a stinging annoyance to the human race, the mosquito was a breeder of plagues and had to be fought in southern climes. Having wrathfully considered his subject and come to the conclusion that no mitigating circumstances could exist, he next put to himself this problem:

"If the mosquito cannot be exterminated, can it be neutralized? If so, how?"

When Snorky Green, to whom Miss Dabtree was more aunt than woman, came bursting in an hour later, with the rebellious consciousness of having thoroughly earned the five-dollar bill which lay in the safest of pockets, he stopped short at the sight of his roommate in that reclining concentration which Sherlock Holmes has popularized, the briar pipe being replaced by a large pencil, on which Skippy was chewing in heavy meditation.

"I say, Skippy, the old girl certainly came up handsome!" said Snorky gleefully, searching for the bill.

"Sh — sh!" said Skippy without turning.

"What the deuce?"

"I want to think."

"Danged if he isn't inventing something else!" said Snorky, who went on tiptoe to a position where he could study the frowning outward signs of the mental disturbances which were undoubtedly working inwardly. At the

end of a silent hour, Skippy condescended to relax.

"Well?" said Snorky excitedly.

Skippy rose with dignity and went to the window, gazing out a moment into the darkling night where unknown myriads of mosquitoes lurked all unconscious of the doom impending over them.

"I say, Skippy, what 's the big idea?"

"It 's big — bigger than anything you ever imagined," said Skippy impressively.

"Are n't you going to tell a fellow?"

"Perhaps."

Now Snorky was not without a certain knowledge of human nature, particularly Skippy-nature, so without further interest he proceeded to disrobe, flipping the five-dollar bill on the table with a rakish gesture and saying carelessly:

"The old gal has a heart, anyhow. However, ta-ta for the night."

Five minutes later Skippy spoke from the depths of his bed.

"Snorky, I 'll tell you this much."

There was a convulsion among the opposite sheets and Snorky sat up.

"Go on, I 'm listening!"

"It 's bigger than bathtubs."

"You don't say so!"

"Snorky, it 's — "

"It 's what?"

"It 's mosquitoes!"

Accustomed as Snorky had become to the young inventor's cryptic methods, his imagination refused to follow.

"You don't see?"

"How the deuce should I see?"

"Snorky, I 'm going to put the mosquito out of business!"

"How in tarnation!"

"When I get through with him," said Skippy loftily, "when my plans are perfected — he 'll starve to death!"

"Oh, say! Skippy, is that all you 're going to tell me?"

"That is all for to-night," said Skippy, who, seizing a slipper, flung it across the room at the evening's candle after the methods introduced by the lamented Hickey Hicks, and plunged the room into darkness.

CHAPTER XIV

The Plot Against the Mosquito

IF close association had brought to Snorky a canny knowledge of his roommate's need of unbosoming himself of a great idea, it had also acquainted Skippy with the profit to be derived from Snorky's overwhelming curiosity, particularly when there were any symptoms of ready cash.

The next afternoon, therefore, without being unduly surprised, he accepted an invitation to accompany Mr. Snorky Green to the home of the Conovers up the road, where the record for pancakes at one continuous sitting stood at forty-nine to the honor (without challengers) of the Hon. Hungry Smeed.

Somewhere between the fourteenth and fifteenth pancake, having solicitously offered the maple syrup, Snorky said casually:

"That 's a jim-dandy idea of yours, old horse, about mosquitoes."

"I 'm looking at it from all sides."

This answer did not satisfy Snorky Green's thirst for information, so he said encouragingly:

"It 's a great idea. You must."

"Heard of Luther Burbank and what he does with plants?"

"Sure, that was in last week's lecture. Seedless fruit and all that sort of thing."

"Snorky," said Skippy meditatively, "who knows but some day a scientist will cross the mosquito with a butterfly?"

"What good 'll that do?"

"It would take the sting out of the mosquito, would n't it?"

"Suppose it put it into the butterfly."

"If you 're going to be facetious —" said Skippy, who, being sufficiently fed, rose with dignity, glad of the opportunity to postpone the discussion to another appetizing sitting.

For a week Snorky Green, greatly impressed by the concentrated moodiness of his chum's attitude, artfully fed him with pancakes, éclairs, Turkish paste, and late at night tempted him with deviled chicken and saltines to be washed down with ginger pop and root beer.

Skippy, having calculated nicely the possibilities of the exchequer, threw out progressively dark, mysterious hints that fed Snorky's curiosity, without any open gift of his confidence. Even Doc Macnooder, aware by all outward signs that the imagination which had conceived of the Foot Regulator was again fermenting, had laid his arm about his shoulders and led him to the Jigger Shop.

But the Skippy Bedelle, who had assumed the trials and tribulations of manhood, had

profited by the first disillusionments. The trusting, childlike faith was gone forever and in his new, skeptical attitude towards human nature — Toots Cortrelle excepted — he had determined to part with as few millions as possible.

"I say, Skippy, how 's it working out?" said Snorky at eleven P.M., producing the crackers and cheese, after having blinded the windows and hung a blanket over the telltale cracks of the door.

"Fine!"

"Is that all you 're going to tell me?" said Snorky with his hand on the cheese.

"Not yet, but soon," said Skippy, whose appetite always betrayed his caution.

"In that case I serve notice right here I 'm through with the financing!"

"The financing!"

"What else do you call it?" said Snorky indignantly, producing the last two quarters from his pocket, and restoring the cheese to its box.

"All that will go down to your credit account," said Skippy in a conciliatory tone. "I 'll tell you this much. There 's nothing in the butterfly idea — it would take too long."

"Huh! You did n't think I bit on that! Well, how 're you going to clean 'em up? They destroy 'em in Cuba with kerosene — I 've been reading up. Is it something like that?"

"Destroy them, why destroy them?" said Skippy reprovingly.

"Why not?"

"If you destroy mosquitoes you destroy your income, you poor boob," said Skippy with his superior manner. "Let 'em live — who profits? I do."

Snorky rose and produced the Bible.

"Come on," he said, in a fever of excitement. "I 'm ready. Give me the oath."

"You 'll take the oath on my own terms!" said Skippy, looking at him fixedly.

"What do you mean, terms?"

"Snorky, it 's so big it may take years of investigation, you understand — "

"Sure."

"This time I 'm not giving up any fifty-one per cent."

"Let her go!"

"And if any one goes in they go in on a salary!"

"Oho! I see."

"Well?"

"All right, I 'll swear," said Snorky, after a brief wrestling between his curiosity and his financial instincts.

"It may be years working out," said Skippy sadly. "Maybe our children will live to see it; but Snorky, some day, I 'm telling you, when the idea is perfected, the mosquito is going to starve to death!"

Snorky, without waiting to be prompted, hurriedly took an oath to guard the secret from man woman and child and called down the scourges of Jehovah on his nearest of kin if he should ever prove false.

"Snorky," said Skippy, folding his arms behind him and spreading his legs after the manner ascribed to the famous Corsican, "where do mosquitoes bite you the most?"

"Golly! Where don't they?" said Snorky, who, thus reminded, began to scratch back of his ears.

"Where do they bite where you can't hear them coming?"

"Legs and ankles," said Snorky instantly.

"Bright boy — you 're getting closer."

"Danged if I can see it."

"Protect the ankles and the mosquito starves — am I right?"

"Hurry up," said Snorky, who by this time recognized that the first reasoning processes were simply eliminatory.

"That was my problem," said Skippy, frowning impressively. "Here is the answer — this is how it came to me." He went to the bureau and passed his hand into a sock, two fingers projecting through the devastated regions. "What do you call this?"

"That — that 's my sock."

"You call 'em hole-proof socks," said Skippy, ignoring the aspersion. "You get it? You

don't? Suppose we change it, suppose we use the same organization but call it — Mosquito-Proof Socks."

"Mosquito-Proof Socks!" said Snorky in a whisper.

Skippy, satisfied at the staggering effect produced, stood with a smile waiting for the full result.

"But, Skippy, is it — possible?" said Snorky faintly when he had brought his lower jaw back under control.

"That 's not the way to look at it," said Skippy impatiently. "Is the idea A No. 1, or is it not?"

"The idea? My aunt's cat's pants — the idea!" said Snorky all in a breath, "Mosquito-Proof Socks! Why, it 's — it 's — it 's — " But here Snorky stopped, nonplussed, having exhausted his supply of adjectives on the Foot Regulator.

"It is!" said Skippy firmly.

"But won't they be too heavy?"

"What the deuce — "

"Why, they 'd have to be regular bullet-proof, would n't they?"

"Say! What do you think I 'm talking about — Tin Socks?"

"Why, I thought — "

"Listen! This is the way you get at it," said Skippy, walking up and down in ponderous concentration but pausing from time to time to

dip into the cheese. "You begin by looking at it from the point of view of the mosquito. A mosquito has got nerves, has n't he, just like a horse or a cat or a bullfrog?"

"Sure he has."

"What frightens a mosquito most?"

"Is it a joke?" said Snorky thoughfully.

"Green —"

"I apologize," said Snorky hastily, and he brought out a bottle of sarsaparilla.

"A horse shies at a bit of paper; a sneeze will scare a cat, won't it? Well, then, what will scare a mosquito — it 's all there!"

"Well, what *will* scare a mosquito?" said Snorky, wide-eyed.

"That is the field of investigation," said Skippy in a melancholy voice.

"But you said Mosquito-Proof Socks!"

"I did. Suppose a harsh sound annoys a mosquito; all you 've got to do is to suspend a tiny rusty bell —"

"I don't like that," said Snorky instantly.

"Why not?"

"It does n't sound modest — "

"That is probably not the way," said Skippy, dismissing this objection with a wave of his hand. "I 'm thorough, that 's all. Supposing there are certain colors that scare him or make him seasick — red and purple or yellow and violet."

"By jingo! Now you 're talking."

"Suppose the mosquito has some deadly enemy. Then all you 've got to do is to work his picture into the design of the socks."

"Holy cats!"

"Supposin' it 's just the sense of smell you get him by —"

"Citronella!" fairly shouted Snorky.

"Hush!" said Skippy, alarmed at the outbreak.

"Citronella!" said Snorky in a whisper.

"You see? Mosquito-Proof Socks is the idea — and there must be fifty ways of working it out."

"Cheese it!" said Snorky, dousing the light at a sound in the hall.

At a point somewhere between the witching hour and the dawn Snorky said in a tentative whisper:

"Hey there, Skippy! Are you awake?"

"What is it?"

"Gosh! Skippy, I can't sleep. It 's just steaming around in my brain!"

"M. P. S.?"

"You bet. I can't see anything but them, millions of them!"

"Mosquitoes?"

"No — legs! Holy Jemima! Skippy, have you thought how many legs there are in the world? Why, in the United States alone twice ninety-two million. Think of it! And what 'll

they average in socks and stockings? I 've been trying to work it out all night. Gee! My head's just cracking. If you multiply twice ninety-two million by seven pair of socks or even six —"

"Don't!" said Skippy angrily, and he thought to himself, "Thinking of money, thinking of money! How mercenary he is!"

"Standard Oil is nowhere," said Snorky feverishly.

"Don't I know it!"

"Oil 'll run out but there 'll always be mosquitoes and legs!"

"Darn you, Snorky! Shut up and let me sleep!"

But how was he to sleep with the vision that Snorky's avaricious imagination held out to him? All night long he tossed about restlessly, wandering in a forest of legs; white ones and red ones, black ones and yellow ones, tall ones and short ones, fat, thin, bow-legged and crooked, all the legs in the world waiting for him to rise up and protect them!

The next morning it was worse. All his imagination, suddenly diverted from the exact scientific contemplation, was halted before the stupendous contemplation of future profits.

"Snorky Green is a bad influence," he said moodily as he trudged out heavy-headed from morning chapel. Do what he might, the contamination spread. With all the long fatigue

of patient investigation he knew was ahead, his mind leaped over the present and galloped into the future.

"Multiply twice ninety-two million legs by six pair of socks," he found himself repeating. "Oil may run out, but you bet there 'll always be mosquitoes and legs."

Yes, it was greater than Standard Oil. It was fabulous to conceive of the wealth that would be his. All at once the John C. Bedelle Gymnasium seemed ludicrously inadequate. He would double the present equipment! There would be a second campus — Bedelle Circle! The school lacked water; he would create a lake for it and the John C. Bedelle Boathouse. . . .

"Bedelle, kindly shine for us. You may translate, John, but be cautious and not too free."

The Roman's mocking voice brought him precipitately to his feet. He opened his book but the passage had escaped him and though he dug Shrimp Bedient savagely in the back, no signal returned.

"Excellent so far, quite exceptionally excellent; nothing to criticize," said the Roman's rising and falling inflection. "Go on."

"Please, sir, I didn't do the advance."

The class roared and the Roman said:

"Too bad, John, too bad! No luck in guessing this morning. We 're in the review, John.

Too bad! Dreaming again, John? Don't do it, don't do it! The country will take care of itself, without you. Times are hard, John. Another year in the Second Form is a dreadful drain on Father's pocketbook. Sit down, John, and don't dream — don't do it."

Skippy sat down and glared at the Roman.

Some day, some day he would even institute a fund for superannuated teachers, he would! He would come back some day to the school he had made the greatest in the country; he would come as the BENEFACTOR and then the Roman, old, and decrepit in a wheeled chair, would be brought to him, to him, John C. Bedelle, whom as a boy he had held up to the ridicule of the class! What a revenge that would be, the proud and haughty Roman, the greatest flunker of them all, the Roman of the caustic tongue and the all-seeing eye, actually clinging to his hand, stammering out his thanks . . . the Roman whose mocking voice still echoed in his memory, "Don't dream, John, don't do it!"

CHAPTER XV

The Tennessee Shad Suspects

THE Tennessee Shad, as has been told, was long, thin and full of bones. His imagination was chiefly occupied in initiating ideas which would be the cause of exertion in others. In the warmth of the budding season he came out of his winter cage and could be seen for long hours perched on his window sill in the Kennedy, legs pendent; like some dreamy vulture, surveying the horizon for a significant point.

There was little that escaped the Shad. For some time his curiosity had been stirred by the unusual attentions paid to Skippy Bedelle by his old side-partner, Doc Macnooder. Doc was eminently practical and if Doc devoted any part of his time to an inconsequential underformer, in the language of the day, there was something doing.

The early visits of Macnooder to Skippy's room at the time of the Foot Regulator campaign had been noted, likewise the subsequent cooling of the affection. So when after a few weeks' lapse Macnooder was again seen impelling Skippy in the direction of the Jigger Shop with a protecting arm over his shoulders, the

Tennessee Shad whistled softly through his teeth and said to himself:

"I wonder what new flim-flam game is on?"

Now Macnooder was distinctly a trespasser, for Macnooder belonged to the Dickinson and Skippy was of the Kennedy and, by that token, his lawful prize. The Tennessee Shad's vigilance redoubled. He began to note the air of mystery and solemnity which hung over the two roommates, their frequent whisperings and the moments of intense excitement when, with locked arms and heads close together, they drew surreptitiously away from their fellows for secret conclave. When presently Greaser Tunxton, a solitary youngster who ranked high among the polers and high markers with a curious penchant for chemistry, began to be seen in their company, the Tennessee Shad's vigilance became acute.

One night, when after hours he was returning from a midnight spread in King Lentz's room, his ear detected unmistakable signs of activity behind Skippy's door across the hall. A quarter of an hour later two stocking-clad forms stole past his open door and slowly down the treacherous stairs. The Tennessee Shad followed.

Below, the door of Greaser Tunxton opened cautiously and as cautiously closed again. A moment later the Shad, now at the keyhole,

heard the window open and the sounds of a foray into the night. He calculated nicely, passed into the room and out the window and took up the trail of the three shadows moving in the general direction of Memorial Hall.

Ten minutes later the Tennessee Shad, having stalked his prey in classic Deerslayer manner, reached the farther stretches of the pond and, flat on his stomach among the high grasses, heard the following mysterious dialogue:

"How 's this, Skippy?"

"Fine! Must be millions of them."

"Do you suppose they sleep?"

"We 'll wake 'em up."

"Shucks! It 's only bullfrogs," thought the Tennessee Shad; but at this moment perceiving the three in clear silhouette against the faint moonlight, he instantly discarded that explanation. The three wanderers into the night were clothed in helmets, from which voluminous folds of cheesecloth descended to the waists, while each had his trousers rolled up well above the knees. The conversation continued, to his growing mystification.

"They 're awake, all right. I can hear them coming!"

"You 're the boss, Skippy. What 's the order?"

"Twenty paces apart. Greaser, you shake the bell, slowly. Snorky, you stand here, and,

mind you, no slapping or moving. Everything scientific."

"All right, but get a move on. Ouch, I 've got two already."

"Red leg or blue leg?"

"Blue, darn it!"

"Fine! I 'll count a hundred slowly. Start up, Greaser."

The low, harsh, grating sounds of a rusty bell slowly agitated began to be heard, punctuating the droning count: "Five, six, seven!"

"For the love of Willie Keeler, what is it!" said the Shad, more and more bewildered, as he rubbed one leg against the other and shook his head to protect himself from the many insects. "It must be a secret society and this is the initiation."

"Skippy?"

"Hello!"

"The bell 's no good at all."

"Twenty-nine, thirty—remember your oath."

"Say! Count a little faster; I can't hold out much longer."

"Red leg or blue?"

"Both, darn it!"

"Any difference?"

The reply was too blasphemous to be set down here.

The Tennessee Shad, too, was paying dearly the price of his curiosity; so, being convinced that he had stumbled upon a secret initiation,

he decided to get some enjoyment out of the situation. Presently, trumpeting his mouth with his hands, he emitted a long, wailing sound:

"Ugh, wugh, guggle, guggle!"

"Good lord! What was that?"

"Did you hear it?"

"It 's a night owl that 's all; fifty-six, fifty-seven—"

"Oonah, woonah, WOO, HOO!"

"Night owls nothing; it 's ghosts!"

"There ain't no ghosts, you chicken-livered—"

But at this moment the Tennessee Shad, smarting from head to foot, let out an ear-splitting screech and the three experimenters in mosquitology disappeared at top speed. The Tennessee Shad, satisfied, emerged, examined with curiosity a discarded helmet smeared with citronella-soaked cheesecloth, and picked up a rusty dinner bell. This last stuck in the crop of his imagination.

"Secret-society stuff," he said to himself as he slapped his way out of the marsh. "But why the bell? Darn mysterious, that bell. . . ."

CHAPTER XVI

Experiments in Fragrance

THE result of the first investigation in the likes and dislikes of the New Jersey mosquito brought a decided difference of opinion. It was admitted (given the swollen condition of Greaser Tunxton's legs) that the insect's sense of hearing was undoubtedly defective. Snorky Green was equally emphatic in expressing his conviction that all colors were alike to it, but Skippy insisted that it was not scientific to jump to a conclusion on the basis of one experiment.

"But golly! I had forty-seven bites on the red stocking and sixty-five on the blue, and if that does n't prove anything, I 'd like to know what!"

"It proves that blue attracts them more than red, that 's all. We must now try other combinations."

"It proves one thing right here," said Snorky Green, dousing his legs with the second bottle of witch hazel. "I 'm through on the human-experiment game, and that 's flat."

"I 'm inclined to believe we should concentrate on the sense of smell," said Skippy thoughtfully. "As a matter of fact the experiment turned out as I foresaw."

"It did, eh?" said Snorky wrathfully.

Skippy retreated to the other side of the table and hurriedly announced:

"I 've been talking it over with Greaser here and the problem is narrowing down. Now what we 've got to figure out is, shall we make it a washing solution or something that 'll stick forever?"

"Washing solution."

"Sure we could wash the socks in some sort of preparation of citronella, could n't we?"

"That 's too easy. Any one could do that."

"Exactly! That 's why we must experiment further. Greaser's got some very good ideas."

"Oh! Well, bring on your stinks; I can stand them."

"You can?"

"Sure."

"You swear?"

"I swear. What 's the idea, Greaser?"

Greaser Tunxton looked at him hard and thoughtfully before replying.

"You see, citronella comes out in the wash, but there are one or two other things much stronger."

"Citronella 's pretty strong!" said Snorky, who began to wonder if he had promised too rashly.

"Ever heard of asafœtida?" said Skippy, with his hand on the chemical genius.

"That 's the stuff you put on the furnace

at co-ed schools when you want a cut," said Snorky, who knew the story of Dink Stover's reasons for coming to Lawrenceville.

"It is quite possible," said Greaser in his smileless, scientific manner, "that, properly treated, a mixture of silk and cotton, possibly wool, will retain enough of the essential quality of asafœtida for at least a dozen washings—"

"Isn't citronella bad enough?" said Snorky, with a horrible misgiving.

"It's extremely doubtful," said Greaser, shaking his head, "but I don't want to say anything definitely before we make exhaustive experiments."

"Where?" said Snorky, shrinking. "If it's down at the pond again, good night!"

"Green!" said Skippy wrathfully.

"Bedelle to you!"

"The experiments can be conducted right here," said Greaser reassuringly.

"Oh! Well, why didn't you say so?" said Snorky, feeling a little ashamed. "Perhaps after all asa—asa—well, whatever it is, will come out in the wash, too."

"If it does," said Greaser proudly, "I've got something worse."

"Worse!" said Snorky, with a sinking heart.

"*Worse!*" said Skippy joyfully.

"If you put that on," said Greaser, meditating, "the socks will be better than mosquito-proof—even rattlesnakes wouldn't bite you!"

"Criminy! What is it?"

"I know what it is," said Greaser, wagging his head wisely, "but I can't pronounce it!"

Events now moved rapidly. The following morning, despite the draft which entered through three windows and swept out the door, the Roman stopped the morning recitation after five minutes of indignant commotion in the class and, making a detailed investigation, dispensed with the presence of Mr. Snorky Green, Mr. Skippy Bedelle and Mr. Greaser Tunxton (the last with incredulous chagrin) with a request to produce each individual bath record for the week.

At eight o'clock that night Snorky Green deserted the communal laboratory, bag and baggage, announcing that he was through once and for all, and sought asylum of Dennis de Brian de Boru. Finnegan, after the first whiff, barricaded the door and seized a baseball bat to repel any aggression via the transom.

At eight-thirty, the inhabitants of the second floor held an indignation meeting on the steps.

"Holy Moses! What is it?" said the Triumphant Egghead, smelling in the direction of the offending room.

"It 's a dead cat."

"Smells like ripe sauerkraut and garlic!"

"No, it smells like asafœtida."

"The deuce you say! Asafœtida is a maiden's perfume to this!"

"Well, some one 's dead."

"It 's the Greaser, then."

"My Lord! This is awful!"

"Skippy 's found a pet skunk.'

"How in blazes are we going to stand it?"

"We won't."

When the odor had finally rolled down the stairs a house meeting was called and the offenders were summoned to appear. Skippy Bedelle and Greaser Tunxton responded and the house adjourned through the windows. Now it happened that the Roman was dining in Princeton that night and the conduct of discipline was in the hands of a young assistant master, lately transferred from the wilds of the Dickinson, Mr. Lorenzo Blackstone Tapping.

Tabby, as he was more affectionately known, was apt to be somewhat confused, as is natural, before an extraordinary crisis, and had made one or two lamentable blunders. In the present case, after immediately sending in a hurry call for the plumber, he departed in a panic for Foundation House, holding before him on a pair of tongs a pair of reeking football stockings which he had seized in the wash basin, while Skippy Bedelle, under strict orders, remained twenty paces to the rear and out of the wind.

Arrived before the dark and awesome, ivy-hidden portals of the Head Master's dread

abode, Mr. Tapping carefully deposited the unspeakable mess against the stone steps, stationed the rebellious Skippy under an opposite tree and entered, in a fever of excitement.

"Great heavens!" said the Doctor, starting from his chair. "Are you ill?"

"No, sir, it 's not myself. That is, it 's — it 's the whole house; it 's young Bedelle, sir. The fact is, Doctor, the situation was so serious that I — I thought I 'd best come to you directly, sir."

"Try to give the details a little more calmly and coherently, Mr. Tapping," said the Doctor, retreating behind a handkerchief and studying the young assistant with a growing suspicion. He indicated his guest and added, "Professor Rootmeyer of Princeton — Mr. Tapping, one of our younger masters."

Ten minutes later Skippy, shivering under the apple tree, beheld Tabby reappear, take up the tongs gingerly and return to the house. Almost immediately the window of the Doctor's study opened with a bang and there was an iron clank in the near roadway.

"I never smelled such a smell! Is it possible?" said the Doctor, coughing. "What is it?"

"Please, sir, I don't know," said Mr. Tapping miserably.

"You don't know and you are a B. S.?"

"I have n't the faintest idea."

"Well, what is your explanation, or have you any explanation of this extraordinary occurrence?"

"I think, sir, the boy is completely unbalanced."

"Bedelle! He 's always been steady and well conducted."

"He 's been acting queerly lately, sir, and he absolutely refuses to give any explanation. The house, sir, is quite untenantable. I — I don't think the boys can sleep there to-night."

"Where is Bedelle now?"

"He is outside, sir — waiting."

"Perhaps I had better examine into this myself," said the Doctor, frowning. "Bedelle is a good boy — a bit of a dreamer, but a good, reliable boy. Mr. Tapping, you may return to the Kennedy and quiet them. I shall be over later. Keep Bedelle waiting — outside."

"Jim," said Professor Rootmeyer, the distinguished chemist, "there are only two things in God's universe can produce a smell like that — a dead Indian and butyl mercaptan."

The Doctor immediately discarded the first hypothesis.

"Frank, you 've hit it. It *is* butyl mercaptan," he said, laughing.

"Well, how did you know?"

"I remember once when I was a shaver —"

"Go on," said Professor Rootmeyer as the Doctor came to a hurried stop.

"H'm, we are living in the present," said the Doctor after a second thought.

He rose and went to the doorstep.

"Bedelle!"

"Yes, sir."

The stench began to swell with the hurried approach.

"Stop there," said the Doctor hastily, and, having had his imagination sharpened by frequent contact with the genus boy, he added with sudden inspiration: "Go round to my study window. I will speak to you from inside."

A moment later Skippy's white face appeared, framed against the night.

"Bedelle, Mr. Hopkins reports that you were dismissed from first recital this morning, for being in a condition which unfitted you for association with your fellow beings. Is that true?"

"Please, sir, it was the citronella."

"Mr. Tapping reports that the stench arising from your room has made the house untenantable. Is that true?"

"Please, sir, that was asafœtida and—"

"And butyl mercaptan; I 'm quite aware of that," said the Doctor quickly, to continue the tradition of omniscience.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Bedelle, what is your explanation? Were you trying to poison any one?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"You were not contemplating self-destruction, were you?" said the Doctor, whose curiosity led him to adopt a light coaxing manner.

"Please, sir, I was experimenting."

"Experimenting! What for?"

"I 'm sorry, sir, I can't tell you," said Skippy defiantly. He had foreseen the test, but he was resolved to be drawn and quartered before yielding up the secret of his future millions.

"You — can't — tell — ME?" said the Doctor in his pulpit sternness.

"No, sir. I 've taken an oath."

"Do you realize, Bedelle, that you owe me an explanation, that if there is no explanation for this extraordinary attack on the discipline and morale of the school that I should be quite justified in requesting your immediate departure?"

"I know, sir. Yes, sir."

"And you refuse still?"

"It 's an invention, sir. That 's all I can tell you, sir. I 'm sorry, sir. Please, Doctor, I 'd like to stay in the school."

The Doctor considered. He was a just man and his sense of humor allowed him to distinguish between the vicious and the playful imagination. After long, agonizing moments for Skippy waiting at the window, he took a sudden decision.

"Bedelle?"

"Yes, sir."

"If I let you remain at Lawrenceville, will you give me a promise — that so long as you remain here, you won't attempt to invent anything else?"

"So long as I 'm in the school?" said Skippy, broken-hearted.

"Absolutely. It 's that or expulsion. I have four hundred tender lives to protect. Well?"

"I swear," said Skippy, with tears in his eyes.

The Doctor bit hard and said:

"Then I shall overlook this. Your record is in your favor. I shall overlook this. I have your word of honor, Bedelle. Good night."

Skippy drew a long breath and went hurriedly back to the Kennedy. But there he halted. The smell was awful and the comments which reached him through the open windows were not at all reassuring.

"I think — I think perhaps it 's warm enough outside," he said, heavy-hearted.

For two more years he had solemnly sworn to refrain from inventing, and Skippy was a man of his word. No matter, there was this consolation: Mosquito-Proof Socks would some day be a reality; butyl mercaptan had proved its worth at the first test. He would devote himself to a scientific preparation. He was young. With twice ninety-two million legs to

be protected with six pairs of socks or stockings a year, he could afford to wait.

"Before I 'm thirty, I 'll be a millionaire," he said defiantly. "I 'll own race horses and yachts and boxes at the opera and I 'll marry— " Here he hesitated and the figure of Lillian Russell somehow became confused with a new apparition. Something that was and was not Miss Virginia Dabtree, but most certainly wore silver stockings, which it would be his duty and privilege to protect. "Well, anyhow, she 'll drive a four-in-hand and wear pearls for breakfast," he concluded, and, whistling, he went down to dream out the night in the baseball cage.

CHAPTER XVII

Soap and Sentiment

TEN days after the dreadful fiasco of the Mosquito-Proof Socks, when a corps of experts had succeeded in removing the stench from the upper floors of the Kennedy; when certain garments had been taken out under a vigilantes committee and had been publicly interred; when the three offenders had again been permitted to resume their membership in civilized society — Snorky Green began to be alarmed at certain disquieting symptoms in the conduct of Skippy Bedelle.

"I don't like it," he said, standing before his roommate's washstand in a dark revery. "Danged if I like the looks of things. Somethin' is certainly doing. It certainly is."

He picked up a large new nailbrush, showed it to Dennis de Brian de Boru, who had been called in consultation, and shook his head.

"Spending his money on bric-a-brac like that — and that 's not all!" he said indignantly.

"Let me know the worst," said Dennis who, perched on the table tailor fashion, had been ruminating, and when Dennis de Brian de Boru remained silent, the mental wheels were grinding rapidly. "Fire away, if you want to know anything — ask me."

Snorky proceeded to lift the broken cover of the soap dish, and brought forth a cake which he tendered gingerly to Dennis for his olfactory inspection.

"What a lovely pink stink!" he exclaimed, after one sniff. "Smells like the cook on her Sunday off."

"Are you convinced?"

"I am. Skippy, the human scent-box is undoubtedly in love. Object matrimony."

"He 's got it bad this time," said Snorky, remembering that they had a reputation as lady-killers to maintain.

"If you will associate with 'em, it 's bound to happen," said Finnegan in his rapid fire style. "I know the symptoms. My brother Pat went maudlin, when he was just Skippy's age. Ten years of it, presents Christmas and birthdays, flowers twice a month, postage stamps and letter paper, weekly bulletins and all that sort of rot! Ten years, and then he married a girl, best friend stuff, trust you together and all that —married her a month after he met her. Think of the expense. Not for me, old top—my money goes for race horses."

"You 've nothing to worry over, you wild Irishman," said Snorky, who felt a certain presumption in this lesson.

"Casting aspersions? Oh, I don't know! I may not be beautiful, but women, proud women, have sighed as I passed."

"Run away," said Snorky impatiently.

"I was just going," said Dennis with dignity. At the door he paused for a parting shot. "Hard luck, old gormandizer. There won't be so many midnight spreads for you, now. Cut down the jiggers, shut up the pantry, tighten the belt! Skippy 'll need his money for *other* things. Thank the Lord the only thing he can get into of mine, is a necktie. Hard luck!"

Perhaps a little of the practical reactions had occurred to Snorky, for he flung a shoe at the diminutive Finnegan and was still in a brown study when Skippy came in.

"If he starts to wash he 's in love. Bet that 's why he 's been so friendly," he thought, waiting developments. "I thought it was queer he did n't sulk more after the big smell!"

In fact Snorky had been considerably puzzled at his roommate's actions after the fiasco of the Mosquito-Proof Socks.

"Any mail?" said Skippy nervously.

"I don't think so."

"Are you sure?"

"Come to think about it, there might be a letter over on the table."

The Byronic melancholy vanished from Skippy's face. He sprang to the table and seized the envelope.

"Feeling better?" said Snorky, noting the beneficial results.

"Much."

"You look ten years younger."

"You go to blazes!" said Skippy, but without anger. He went to the bed and flinging back the mattress uncovered three pairs of trousers slowly hardening into that razor edge which is the *sine qua non* of a man of fashion. Apparently satisfied, he next proceeded to the mirror, where, after a short inspection, he seized his brushes, dipped them into the water pitcher and laboriously began to reconstruct the perfect part that was beginning to replace the Skippy cowlick. Trousers may be brought to order in a few minutes, but to subdue a cowlick is a matter of years. Ten minutes' rigorous application of the brushes failing to produce results, he ducked into the washbasin, drove a line with the comb, slicked down the sides and applied a press, in the form of a derby, which process will subdue the most recalcitrant of cowlicks for at least two hours.

"Aha! Object matrimony?" said a squeaky voice.

Skippy looked up wrathfully to perceive the curious eyes of Dennis de Brian de Boru gazing from the transom. Both brushes went flying across the room, but Dennis knew when his presence was *de trop*. The episode shook off the derby and deranged the part. Snorky watched the process of reconstruction with a meditative glance.

"Skippy, old horse, you are *so* spick and span. Has love really come to you?"

"You go take a run and jump," said Skippy lightly and he began to whistle a genial air.

Now if Bedelle had denied the direct accusation, Snorky would have been certain of its truth, vice versa if the answer had been broadly affirmative, Snorky would have at once dismissed the suspicion. Skippy's light, *de haut en bas* manner left him unconvinced. Circumstantial evidence was all he had to go on, but the evidence was strong. Skippy undeniably was a changed man.

"What day is it?" said Skippy, who had been reading over the letter.

"Wednesday, you chump."

"Three days to Saturday," said Skippy with a sigh. He went to the washstand, poured out the water and began to scrub diligently at his nails.

"Well, you ought to get them clean by that time," said Skippy facetiously.

"What 's that?"

"So you are in love?" said Snorky, shifting the conversation.

"What makes you think so?"

"Go ahead, open your heart, what 's a roommate for?"

"You 'd be a nice one to confide in! Why not shout it in a telephone?"

"Hold up, that 's a raw deal," said Snorky

rising wrathfully. "I may have weakened under that awful stink, but I kept the secret, didn't I? Didn't I stand up three hours against the whole blooming house and did they ever get a word from me about Mosquito-Proof Socks, and in the state of temper they were too? Oh, I say, come now, square deal you know!"

Skippy considered him more favorably. Besides, he remembered that by Saturday he would need to embellish his sartorial display with a few treasures from his chum's wardrobe. He sat down and took his head in his hands.

"Snorky, old fellow, you 're right—I 've got it bad."

"And you 're going over to Princeton Saturday to meet her?" said Skippy, who saw a trail.

"Her, what her?"

"Mimi Lafontaine, of course," said Snorky with a sudden intuition.

"Her name is Tina," said Snorky tragically. "Her first name. Perhaps some day I can tell you her real name, not now."

"Rats, it is Mimi, and you 're going over again to meet her at the game," said Snorky, who knew the Skippy imagination.

"So you think I 'm going to Princeton," said Skippy looking at him wisely. "I am—but from there I am making a cut for New York. Get the point?"

"Oh, Tina 's in New York?"

"She is." He hesitated a moment, and then

weighing his words to give full value to their dramatic significance, he added—"She is on the stage."

"You 're a thundering, whooping, common—a—garden liar," said Snorky, who felt that his sympathies were being trifled with. "Where in blazes would you know an actress anyhow?"

"And you asked my confidence!" said Skippy reproachfully. "Tina and I grew up together. She ran away a year ago. It 's a terrible story, terrible! She 's had the devil of a life, poor little girl. Gosh, if I were only twenty-one!"

"Skippy, if you are faking it again this time," said Snorky, whose confidence was shaken by the perfect seriousness of his chum's melancholy. "If you are, dinged if I 'll ever believe another word."

"See here—did I volunteer to tell you?" said Skippy, who rose with a complete injured air. "That settles it. This is all you 'll ever know."

And leaving Snorky in a ferment of curiosity he went to his desk, drew out a sheet of paper and began to run his fingers through his hair.

Snorky, as a matter of fact, had hit the nail on the head, though of course it would never do to have him suspect it. Skippy did not mind confiding to him his state of mind, in fact it was absolutely necessary if he were to go on without an internal explosion to seek some sympathy

and understanding. But to admit to Snorky that he had actually succumbed to Mimi the Japanese brunette, particularly when the issue was still clothed in doubt,—was unthinkable. So Skippy invented Tina.

CHAPTER XVIII

Love Comes Like the Measles

IT had all happened the Saturday before, when for reasons of her own Miss Clara Bedelle (the reasons taking shape in the heroic figure of Turkey Reiter, captain of the eleven, and the Triumphant Egghead, premier danseur of the school) had asked Skippy to invite those heroes, as she, being already wise in protective knowledge, preferred not to show her affection too directly. Skippy, on receipt of these sisterly directions, had been in a towering rage, for it had never occurred to him that men of the world such as Turkey and the Egghead would for a moment condescend. If it had not been for the added bait of a Princeton game, he would never have found the courage. The result upset all his preconceived theories, and it was not until he found himself on the high road to Princeton, actually squeezed into a buggy between two eager and enthusiastic lords of the school that he attempted to reason it out. The attempt, however, was beyond him. If girls as such were incomprehensible, how the deuce was he, Skippy Bedelle, to conceive that such a thing as a sister, particularly his sister, could arouse any enthusiasm?

"Guess it 's the grub and the game all right,"

he reflected finally. "Anyhow they will let me alone, that 's something."

At lunch it did seem that his wish was to be gratified and despite certain sisterly glances of reproach, he was able to secure a third helping of roast beef and a double portion of ice cream and cake, with the connivance of Miss Biggs the chaperone, while Sister and Miss Lafontaine attended to the chatter. So engrossed was he in this attempt to stock up for the long week ahead, that he completely failed to notice the comedy which was being played to the greater edification of Mr. Turkey Reiter and the obvious disconcerting of the Triumphant Egghead, who was being neglected flagrantly and openly for mysterious reasons known only to the ladies.

Skippy, therefore, was totally unprepared, as he was both shocked and terrified, suddenly to find himself at the side of Miss Mimi, with Turkey and his sister behind, while the Triumphant Egghead, not to give his tormentor any further satisfaction, was pretending to laugh uproariously at something that his companion, Miss Biggs, had just said. For five minutes Skippy was in the most complete funk of his life. His body seemed suddenly all hands and pockets and do what he would his feet would interfere as they had that awful day eight months before when he had descended into the family parlor in the first pair of long trousers.

"I think that Princeton is just the sweetest place in the world, don't you?" said Miss Lafontaine with the air of a great discovery.

"I 'm preparing for Yale," said Skippy hoarsely.

"Oh, I 'm so glad," said the young lady immediately, and sinking her voice to a confidential whisper, she added, "you know I 'm Yale too though you must n't give it away. I think Yale men have such strong characters, don't you? You can't help but admire them, can you?"

Skippy had no ideas upon any subject whatsoever at that moment, besides he had n't the slightest idea what she meant. So he took out his handkerchief and then put it back suddenly, as he remembered that a nose was never blown in polite society. As Miss Lafontaine's sole object in appropriating Skippy was the reflex action on the Triumphant Egghead, it was absolutely necessary that Skippy should at least give the appearance of appreciating the privilege. Miss Mimi, therefore, decided to jump the fence of strict conventionality if the expression be permitted.

"Jack," she said, coming closer, "own up now, you are a terrible woman-hater, are n't you?"

"Damn all sisters," he muttered to himself. Then he looked up and met at the deadliest of ranges, the smiling, mischievous eyes of the

Japanese brunette. Despite himself, he broke into a laugh.

"Girls do give me a pain," he said abruptly, "but for the love of Mike, I mean for heaven's sake, don't tell Sis I said that."

Miss Mimi immediately passed her hand through his arm.

"Won't you try very, very hard, Jack, to make an exception?"

He breathed hard and something warm went up his back like the warm ripple of the hot water when his body slowly immersed. If Snorky Green could see him now! Mimi hanging on his arm, Mimi's soft voice pleading with him, Mimi, just as she had done in the fictitious weeks, throwing herself at him, actually throwing herself at him! He tried to remember one of the dozen eloquent replies he had once evolved, but nothing came.

"I say, you 're not a sister, are you?"

Miss Lafontaine was considerably puzzled by this but pretended that she was an only child.

"Well that makes a difference; I thought you could n't be," said Skippy unbending a little, "you act differently."

"Oh I see," said Mimi, who had half expected a display of sentiment, "are n't you a funny man. So you don't approve of sisters?"

She had called him a man — perhaps after all his sister had not told the age of his trousers.

He straightened up and answered, "Oh, I suppose they are all right—later on."

"Jack—you *are* a woman-hater!"

"Oh, I don't know," he said, beginning to be flattered, and he fell to wondering how he could call her Mimi, which of course was his right.

"I 'll tell you a secret, but perhaps you know it already. Perhaps after all you are only making fun of me."

"Oh, I say, Mimi," he said all in a gulp and then blushed to his ears.

The young lady, noticing this, smiled to herself and continued:

"Well, if you are simply pretending, it 's a very good way to get a lot of attention, but of course you know that."

"I? What? Oh, really you don't think!"

"Well, I don't know. Because of course that is what does make a man interesting. It is such a compliment when he does take notice. Now a man like Mr. Sidell who jollies every girl he meets—"

"The Egghead is a terrible fusser," said Skippy with new appreciation of his own value, "you should have seen him at the Prom."

"Did he have Cora Lantier down, the blonde girl with the big ears?"

"She was blonde but I did n't notice the ears. She was down two weeks ago."

"Oh, she was?"

Miss Lafontaine glanced backward and snug-

gled a little closer. Skippy began to be aware of the strangest of symptoms; at one moment he felt a rush of blood to the forehead just like the beginnings of bronchitis, the next moment his throat was swollen as though it were the mumps, yet immediately there came a weakness in his knees that could only be influenza. The warm contact of the little hand penetrated through his sleeve, the sound of her voice shut out all other sounds in his ears, and when he met her eyes his glance turned hastily away and as avidly returned.

Mimi Lafontaine at the age of nineteen knew very little of the school curriculum, but had a marked aptitude for the liberal intuitive arts.

"Mimi would flirt with a clothes horse, if you flung a pair of trousers over it," a dear friend had said of her, and on the present occasion she was deriving a good deal of pleasure from the situation. The attitude of a young lady of nineteen, about to emerge into society, vis-a-vis with a youngster sprouting out of his first long trousers, particularly when he happens to be the brother of a best friend, is a fairly obvious one. There is no excitement to be derived but a certain amount of exercise. A fisherman is necessarily a man who enjoys catching fish, and if trout are not rising to the fly, sitting on the edge of the wharf and hauling in suckers is still fishing.

At the end of the afternoon Skippy was head

over heels in love. If he had had the opportunity he would have trusted her with the secret of his life's ambition — the Bathtub and the Mosquito-Proof Socks. But Miss Mimi was too busy extracting information about the Triumphant Egghead (who had countered by steadfastly devoting himself to Miss Biggs) and certain sentimental chapters in the past of her best friend in which she had had a revisionary interest. These subleties naturally were beyond the experience of Skippy, in fact he was quite unable to reason on anything. His heart was swollen to twice its natural size, his pulse was racing, and the next moment with the wrench of the farewell, he felt in a numb despair, the light go out of the day, and a vast sinking weight rushing him down into chill regions of loneliness.

"Say Skippy, old sporting life," said Turkey Reiter, speaking over his head to the Egghead, who was in a terrific sulk, "How do you do it?"

"Do what, Turk?"

"Why, my boy, you 're the quickest worker I ever saw; I thought the Egghead knew his business, but he 's a babe, a suckling to you!"

"Mimi Lafontaine is the damnedest little flirt I ever met," said the Egghead, with a slash of his whip which sent the buggy careening on two wheels.

"Hold on there!" said Turkey, grabbing the reins. "I 've got to live another week. Well,

Skippy, my hat 's off to you, old sporting life. You 've got her feeding out of your hand . . . And Mimi too, right under the Egghead's eye!"

"Oh, come off now, Turkey," said Skippy, to whom this light badinage was torture.

"Shucks!" said the Egghead, "you know her game."

"Well you played a pretty slick game yourself, old horse, but how did you enjoy Miss Biggs?"

"You go chase yourself," said the Egghead, flinging the remnants of a cream puff at the horse, which kept Turkey busy for the next five minutes.

Skippy scarcely heard. All he wanted was to have the drive over and to be alone with his memories. How bold he had been at the end when he had crushed her little hand in his! Had she understood — and just what had she meant when she had said,

"And so it 's Jack and Mimi now, isn't it?"

That night at precisely 10.45 in his sixteenth year, hanging out of the second story window of the Kennedy, with a soul above mosquitoes, Skippy Bedelle discovered the moon.

Forty-eight hours later, Skippy suddenly realized that the hot and cold symptoms, the loss of appetite, the inability to concentrate his mind on either "The Count of Monte Cristo" or "Lorna Doone," the hardness of his bed,

the length of the day were not due to either German measles or the grippe. He was suffering from something that neither Dr. Johnny's pink pills, nor his white ones nor the big black ones could alleviate. He was in love, genuinely, utterly, hopelessly in love.

CHAPTER XIX

The Urchin Begins to Bloom

THE first result of young love was a sudden aversion to the well-known but freckled features of Skippy Bedelle. The examination in the looking-glass had left him in a condition of abject despair. Only a man, full-fledged and resplendent, could hope to hold the affections of the dazzling Mimi Lafontaine, and what a tousled, scrubby little urchin he was! That night he spent one dollar and twenty cents, out of a slender reserve, for toilette accessories, and began the long fight for a part in the middle of his reckless, foaming hair.

The next day marked a milestone in the sentimental progression of Mr. John C. Bedelle. For the first time in his life, his astonished eyes encountered a little blue envelope inscribed to his name in a large, dashing, unmistakably feminine hand. Neither mother nor sister, aunt or cousin had ever addressed that letter. He picked it up and then set it down with a sudden swimming feeling. It was postmarked "Farmington."

"My Lord, if it should be from her," he said.

There was, of course, one sure way to solve the difficulty, but Skippy was too overcome by his emotion to imag ne it. Instead, he sat down

and contemplated it with a mystical veneration.

"It can't be. No, no, it can't be from Mimi! Good Lord, no. A girl does n't write to a man first," he said, shaking his head. "It 's from Sis. It 's a joke, and she 's got some one else to address it. That 's it."

He opened the letter, which read as follows:

DEAR JACK.

I 'm writing you for Clara, who is, as you know, a dreadfully lazy person. School is over and I shall bring Clara back to Trenton with me day after to-morrow. Are you so bored with my dreadful sex or have you made a little exception? Any way, this is to warn you that you may have to be my cavalier once more if we decide to go again to Princeton.

Faithfully yours,

MIMI.

I saw Cora Lantier in New York. She is going up to the Williams Commencement with a *very dear* friend. Don't tell this to Mr. Sidell.

There are, of course, three ways of contemplating a letter written by a young lady, according to whether the recipient be a friend, is in love, or being in love, loves without hope. Skippy used all three methods. That night he placed four pairs of trousers to press under his mattress, discarded the dicky (a labor saving device formed by the junction of two cuffs and a collar which snapped into place and fulfilled the requirements of table etiquette), and painted the ends of his fingers with iodine to break himself of the habit of living on his nails.

On the following Saturday, Mr. Sidell being still, as it were, under absent treatment, Mr. Turkey Reiter making the fourth, Skippy ex-

perienced the terrifying joy of sitting in the back seat next to Miss Mimi Lafontaine.

"You bad boy, why didn't you answer my letter?" said that young lady, after a careful inspection of the embarrassed Skippy had resulted in much increased satisfaction.

"I wrote you three times," he said, staring at his shoes.

"Three—then they must have gone to the school."

"I tore them up," he said, under his voice.

Between a feminine nineteen and a masculine fifteen, much is permissible. Miss Mimi, under protection of the rug, slid her little hand into his painfully-scrubbed one.

"Poor fellow!" she said softly.

"Gee!"

It was not exactly the last word in romance, but it came from the heart, a sort of final gasp as Skippy felt the waters closing above him. With her hand in his, something rose in his throat and he had to fight back the dimming of his eyes. By the time they rolled into Princeton there was no longer need of explanation. He felt that she knew beyond the shadow of a mistake, just what he felt for her, he, Skippy, who had never loved before. Of course she was not pledged. That he comprehended. She was yet to be won. The years between them were nothing. Josephine Beauharnais was older than Napoleon. By the time they returned to

the school, he had opened his heart impulsively and spread before the astonished ideal of his affections the treasures of his inventive imagination. Miss Lafontaine had been sympathetic. She had understood at once. She had rather lightly passed over the Bedelle Improved Bathtub. The subject, of course, was a delicate one; but the idea of mosquito-proof stockings had captured her imagination. With her faith acquired he could wait for years the coming opportunity.

"Why, Jack, I never heard of such an imagination," she said, converting an explosive laugh into a sneeze in the nick of time.

"Oh, that 's just a beginning," he said confidently. "I 've got bigger things than that stored away."

"Why, you 'll be richer than Rockefeller!"

"That 's only a small part of it," he said carelessly. What of course he had wished her to know, and he flattered himself that he had done it with great delicacy, was that he was a prize worth waiting for.

"You didn't tell Mr. Sidell about Cora, did you?" said Mimi irrelevantly, as they arrived at the school and she began anxiously to scan the passing groups.

"You bet I didn't, good Lord, no, Mimi."

"I was sure I could trust you," said Miss Lafontaine, — who of course had hoped for quite a different issue.

"Gee! this has been one day," he said, half smothered with emotion.

"Has it really?" said the young lady, giving his arm a little squeeze.

"I shall never, never forget."

"Jack, that 's what they all say."

Her skepticism pained him. He wanted to do something, something heroic to show her the manly quality of his devotion.

"I don't suppose there 's any chance of your getting permission to come back with us for dinner," said Clara Bedelle to Turkey.

"About as much chance as my passing a Bible exam," said Turkey cheerfully.

A great idea smote down on Skippy, — he would accomplish the impossible!

"Swear to keep a secret, Mimi?" he said in a whisper.

"I swear."

"I shall call on you at exactly nine thirty to-night."

"Good gracious, but we 're ages away."

"What difference does that make? There is something I 've just got to say to you."

"But if they catch you!"

"They won't."

"But, Jack, how will you get there?"

"I 'll come on the run," said Skippy gorgeously; which proved that if his experience was limited he had certain intuitions to build upon.

When Skippy directly after supper bolted to his room and began to scrub for the superlative toilette, after collecting a pair of kid gloves from Butcher Stevens and a purple tie from Dennis de Brian de Boru, Snorky Green was finally convinced that matters had reached a serious pass.

"I thought you were in New York," he said, remembering Skippy's previous declaration.

"What? Oh yes!" Skippy, whose mind was not on consistency, hastily caught himself. "Oh, Tina! She came down to meet me."

"What in the mischief are you up to now?"

"For the love of Pete don't bother me," said Skippy. "Tell you later. Honest, Snorky, it 's serious, and I 'm in a devil of a hurry."

He struggled into his best pair of low blacks, and suddenly a new perplexity arose. What would they look like after five miles tramp through the fields and the dust? Yet if he openly pocketed a shoe-brush and cloth, how explain this to the ever-incredulous Snorky? The window was open. He simulated a final polish and profiting by a favorable moment tossed the brush and cloth out into the dark. Then he stationed himself before the mirror for the final struggle to achieve a part.

"Looks like last year's toothbrush," said Dennis de Brian de Boru, via the transom, his usual defensive position.

"Looks like the home rooster when the imported bantam has left," said Snorky.

"Looks like a cat that 's walked in the mucilage."

"That 'll be quite enough," said Skippy, whose patience was evaporating.

"Vaseline 'll do the trick," said Dennis softly.

Vaseline! Skippy seized upon the idea in desperation. But to his horror, once the part was achieved, the slippery and sticky effect of the flattened hair was horrifying.

"Where in Moses is that Irishman!" he cried, slamming open the door.

"Face powder will take the shine off," said Snorky, after an immersion of the head in the washbasin had aggravated the catastrophe.

"My Lord, I 've got to do something," said Skippy, almost in tears. Snorky came to his rescue and between a vigorous rubbing with a bath towel and a liberal sprinkling of talcum powder, an effect was finally produced which at least was not shiny. Skippy, who had been glancing at his watch every three minutes, ended his toilette in a whirl.

"How much money have you got?"

Snorky produced three quarters.

"I 'll send it back to you if I don't return."

A light burst over Snorky, confirming his worst suspicions.

"Skippy," he said, seizing his arm, "you 're running away! You 're going on the stage!"

He had not thought of this, but he appropriated the suggestion at once by avoiding a denial.

"Snorky, old pal," he said solemnly, "stand by me now. When it 's all over I 'll write you."

"But, good Lord, Skippy—"

"Don't try to stop me. My mind 's made up."

"But I say—"

"I 've given my *word*," said Skippy tragically. "If I 'm not back by eight o'clock tomorrow morning, mail this letter to my mother and give this to the Doctor. Good-bye. God bless you—and I 'll pay you back the first money I earn."

CHAPTER XX

The Heart of a Brunette

HE recovered the shoebrush from under the window of Tabby, the young assistant house-master, and tucking it into his pocket, skirted the outer limits of the school, dodged behind a fence, and creeping on all-fours, made a wide detour via the pond and rejoined the high road to Trenton which lay five dusty miles away. Luckily the evening was overclouded and the shadows protecting. His problem was not simply to arrive at the Lafontaines' at exactly the hour but to arrive there with a cool and dignified appearance. It was hot, and the derby hat pressed down on the vaselined hair was hotter than anything about him, hotter even than the parched fields and the steaming asphalt which yielded to his feet.

"Gosh, I oughter have brought a towel," he said, when at the end of twenty minutes he stopped to remove his hat and allow the hot vapors to escape. He sat down and fanned himself vigorously. Then he took off his necktie and collar and placed them in his pocket, and finally shed his coat under favor of the night. He could scarcely distinguish the road beneath him, and several times only saved himself from sprawling on his nose by a convulsive grasping

at a nearby fence. But what did the toil, the heat, or the terrors of the night matter? He was going to see her again. Not only that but he would come to her surrounded by the romance of a great danger run, just to sit in her presence, to hear her voice, to see in her eyes some tender recognition of what he had dared for her. This was romance indeed!

A dog came savagely out of the night. How was he to know that a fence intervened? He ran a quarter of a mile and again sat down. It grew hotter; he was dripping from head to foot. A wagon or two went by, but he did not dare to ask for a ride, for fear of encountering some agent of the Doctor's secret police. For, perhaps, his absence was already discovered and the alarm had gone out.

The heat and the discomfort somewhat interfered with the free play of his imagination, but the quality of romance still kept with him.

"When I 'm twenty-one," he said to himself again and again, in a vague defiance of all the hostile powers of Society. Only five years and six weeks intervened before the glowing horizon of liberty. Did she care? Even that did not matter. She knew what the future held for him. The main thing, the thing to cling to, was that her heart was kind. Of that there could be no question. How gentle and how understanding she had been! He could come to her and tell her anything — absolutely anything!

"Good Lord, what a difference it makes to have some one you can trust," he said solemnly to the night. "Some one to work for!"

At nine o'clock he reached the outskirts of Trenton, and having cooled off, put on his collar and necktie. Then he stopped at a stationer's to ask his way. A large florid young woman, chewing gum, was behind the counter, patting down her oily chestnut curls.

"Say, can you tell me where the Lafontaines live?" he said with an extra polite bow.

Fortunately she knew and directed him.

"You 're one of them Lawrenceville boys, ain't you?" she said, eyeing with curiosity the oozy ruffle of his hair.

Skippy was shocked at this easy discovery of his youth.

"Come off. I 'm a member of the Princeton faculty," he said loftily.

"Well, I think you 're one of them Lawrenceville boys," she said, following him to the door.

He waved back gaily and went skipping up the street. He arrived before the Lafontaine mansion with exactly five minutes to spare. The old Colonial house was set back in a wide plot and masked by convenient foliage. Skippy, passing down the side wall, sheltered himself behind a bush, his heart pumping with excitement, and drew on the gloves which he had borrowed from Butcher Stevens. Then extracting the shoebrush and cloth from his pocket,

he busied himself hurriedly with removing from his trousers and shoes all traces of the dusty way he had come. This done, he hid the brush and cloth under the bush and straightened up. Unfortunately either the last preparations or the terrific sentimental strain of facing his first call upon a member of the opposite sex had so increased his temperature that his forehead was again covered with perspiration.

"Great Willies! I can't go in like this — if I only had a handkerchief — what am I to do?"

But just at the moment when he had improvised into a towel the most available part of his shirt, his heart stood still at hearing above him the following conversation:

"Mimi, you 're a witch," said the voice of his sister, "I never would have believed it."

"Well, my dear, you wanted me to wake him up. I 've done it. Goodness, I never saw any one go down so quickly. I really believe he 's going to propose! If you could have seen his funny eyes when he told me that there was something he just *had* to say to me."

"For heaven's sake keep it up. It 's better than soap, Mimi. One look at his hands and I knew he was in love."

"My dear, what do you think — he 's had my photograph for weeks — the one I gave you, of course. Now if that is n't a real romance. . . ."

"He ought to be spanked, that boy — stealing away from school!"

"My dear, he 's told me all about his life's ambitions."

"What 's that?"

"It 's something about a bathtub — some sort of an invention that 's going to revolutionize the bathtub industry."

"Then it must be the outside of a bathtub," said Clara with a sisterly laugh. "Mimi, I just must hear his proposal."

"You 'll laugh and spoil it all."

"On my honor!"

Ten minutes later, Miss Mimi Lafontaine put on her kindliest smile as ushered in by the maid Mr. John C. Bedelle came magnificently into the room, spick and span, cool as the cucumber is credited to be at any temperature; an immaculate purple tie blooming under an unsullied collar, with only a slight pollen on the carefully-divided hair. How was she to know that, in five minutes, under the sting of betrayed confidence and broken illusions, a complete moral transformation had made of the urchin a man in the embryo, fired by the burning impulses of the deadliest hatred?

He did not stumble or wind himself up in the curtain or upset the bowl of goldfish on the slight étagère by the sofa. He came in with a manner that was so completely nonchalant that Miss Mimi was manifestly impressed.

"Why, Jack, you don't look as though you had *run* at all," she said encouragingly.

"Oh, I picked up a buggy and took it easy," he said, seating himself and arranging the trouser crease with nicety. Then having perceived under the sofa the telltale slippers of Miss Clara Bedelle, he added, "I say, how did you ever keep it from Sis?"

"Oh, she thinks it 's another caller," said Mimi, staring a little. "Really, Jack, I 'm beginning to suspect you 're an old hand."

"Well, of course this is n't the first time," he said, leaning back and sinking his fists in his trousers pockets.

Miss Mimi gave a gasp of astonishment.

"Well, I never, and all you said to me too about the photograph and the letters you tore up."

"Did you really believe all that?" said Skippy with a smile that seemed to cut across his face. His heart was bursting; yet the task of revenge was sweet. "You know Sidell and I are old hunting partners."

Miss Lafontaine sat upright, forgetting everybody in the dismay of her discovery.

"Jack Bedelle, do you mean to say that it was all fixed up between you two?"

Again Mr. John C. Bedelle smiled.

"Oh, we know a trick or two, even if we 're still in school."

Miss Mimi's look was not such as is gener-

"Really, Jack, I'm beginning to suspect you're an old hand." *Page* 140

ally ascribed to the gentler sex. She bit her lip and said furiously:

"You just tell Mr. Sidell—" and then, quite suffocated with rage, she stopped and flung a little fan, furiously, across the room.

"Now I see her as she is," thought Skippy with a healing delight. Aloud he added: "Oh, if you really want to know the truth about Sidell, just ask Sis. She probably put him up to the whole game."

Now this was rather crude, and at another time Miss Lafontaine would have detected the artifice and consequently divined the whole fabrication, but at present she was quite too angry, particularly when she realized that her best friend was a witness to her discomfiture.

"Just what do you mean by that?" she said angrily.

"Why, they 've been sweet on each other for a couple of years," he said, with malice aforethought. "Guess you 're not on to Sis. She 'd steal anything with pants on that came within a mile of her. Ask her sometime about the mash notes the plumber's boy used to shoot up to her window, or perhaps you 'd better not, it gets her too hot. But anyway I advise you to keep your eyes open." He rose, for the sudden shifting of the slippers back of the sofa warned him it was time to depart.

"Good-bye, Mimi," he said carelessly. "Two can play the same game, remember that."

Then, calculating the moment, he bumped into the étagère, upsetting the goldfish, and as the dripping figure of Miss Clara Bedelle emerged with a scream, Mr. Skippy Bedelle, Chesterfieldian to the last, departed saying:

"He laughs best who laughs last."

He arrived at the little stationery shop without having seen where he had been going, his eyes blinded with rage, his mind filled with bitter imprecations. Of his night's infatuation not a vestige remained except the weakness of disillusionment and the suffering of a proud nature.

"Well, Professor, how was your girl?"

He looked up to see the dark-complexioned lady still methodically chewing away.

"She 's like all the rest," he thought darkly, "fooling some man, I bet."

Then his eyes fell on a group of photographs in the shape of postal cards; a wonderful assortment of fleshlings, of young ladies who dazzle and display abundant charms before the footlights. He remembered that an explanation was due to Snorky, and that the explanation would have to be very convincing. One photograph fascinated him; it was so like the way Tina would look, if there were a Tina!

The young lady in graceful tights, legs crossed in a figure four, elbow resting on a marble column, her chin supported by the index

finger, was smiling out at him with a full dental smile.

"Say, do a fellow a favor?" he said.

"Sure for a nice boy like you I will," she said, encouragingly.

"Just sign across here—it 's a joke."

"Oh, it 's a joke?"

"Yes, of course. Sign 'Faithfully yours,'—no—' Fondly yours.' "

"Fondly yours," said the gum chewer, writing with a flourish.

"Tina."

"T—I—N—A."

"Turner."

"Indeed, I 'll not!" said the girl with sudden indignation. "Turner 's my name, and I can't have any such picture—"

"All right, all right, make it 'Tanner' then."

With the photograph as evidence safely bestowed in an inner pocket, he set out on the long homeward trudge. The weakness was gone, his imagination was now all on the story he would have to tell Snorky. Heavens, what had been crowded into one short hour;—love, treachery, revenge and triumph! Once a sudden rush of tears caught him, but he fought down the mood. The test had been soul-trying, but the victory was his. So he marched along, blowing out his courage as he chanted a defiant marching song and if Providence had but endowed him with a tail, he would have carried it

proudly like a banner as he stalked across the campus and found his way into the Kennedy.

"Who is it?" said a startled voice.

"Hush, it 's Skippy."

"Thank God."

Snorky jumped up and caught him in his arms with such genuine emotion that Skippy was profoundly touched, so touched that he almost made a clean breast of this affair — almost but not quite.

"What happened? You look all shot to pieces," said Snorky, holding up a candle and gazing at him in awe.

"It 's all over," said Skippy stonily.

"Over."

"She 'd have had to give up her career and — and I 'm too young yet to support her."

"Honest, Skippy?" said Snorky, with a lingering doubt.

"Here 's all that 's left to me now," said Skippy, and he brought forth the photograph.

CHAPTER XXI

Worldly Wisdom of Skippy Bedelle

WHEN Skippy Bedelle (rage and disillusionment in his heart) had tramped five weary miles back from the city which sheltered that angel of perfidy, Miss Mimi Lafontaine, he said to himself on waking the next morning:

"Well, by the Great Horned Spoon, that 's one thing I won't bite at again." And examining himself in the glass with a new respect—for after all he had handled the situation with magnificent impertinence and if the story was to be retailed in the home circles it would never be introduced by Miss Clara Bedelle—examining himself, then, with a certain pride and satisfaction he said vaingloriously, "Hurray, I 'm vaccinated!"

"How d'ye mean vaccinated?" said Snorky whose head emerged via the morning jersey.

"Did I say vaccinated?" said Skippy surprised and cautious.

"You certainly did," said his chum, who observing the rapidity of his contact with the washbasin, the reappearance of the dicky and the two strokes of the brush which completed his toilette, added with a sigh of relief, " I say, old horse, you look more natural."

Skippy immediately returned to the con-

venient Tina Tanner. He picked up the statuesquely posed photograph, contemplated it and returned it to its place with the air of a man on whom a great passion has burned itself out.

"She was an awfully decent little sort," he said meditatively, "but it would have been an awful mess if I 'd done it."

"Done what?"

"Followed her on the stage."

"Say, whatever made you think you 'd succeed on the stage, you chump?" said Snorky, who always retained a lingering doubt when Skippy grew confidential.

" Oh, I don't know."

"Well, the way you got off 'Horatius at the Bridge '— "

Skippy stretched his arms and yawned deliciously.

"Gee, but a fellow can make an awful fool of himself," he said, thinking now not of the fictitious Tina but of the explanations which must have taken place between his sister and Miss Lafontaine.

"A nice wreck you 'd have made of your life, you big boob," said Snorky taking up the photograph and smelling it curiously to see what perfume an actress employed. "So her name 's Tanner, eh?"

"Her stage name."

"You could n't have married a woman like that."

"Not a word against her."

"Well, anyhow are you vaccinated?"

"Bitten, vaccinated and cured!"

Now when Skippy spoke thus from his heart it was in absolute faith, without the slightest suspicion of the natural course which a habit inevitably must take. A habit is after all but an acquired appetite, and what appetite was ever begun with instant enjoyment! No inveterate smoker ever appreciated his first cigar and the most persistent of tipplers choked once over the first distasteful introduction to the demon rum.

So be it recorded in this history of the sentimental progress of Skippy Bedelle. The impulse which sends the boy back to a second trial of the cigar that stretched him pale and nauseated on the ground, or leads him to a new attempt at the alcoholic mixture which scorched his throat, alone may explain how it came to pass that Skippy, after the first disillusioning contact with the opposite sex in the person of Miss Mimi Lafontaine, should in the first week of his summer vacation have fallen under the despotism of Miss Dolly Travers.

There were, as will be seen, extenuating circumstances and perhaps likewise much may be explained by the instinctive belief which is implanted in mankind, that woman is twofold, and that the brunettes of the species are less deadly

than the blondes, or vice versa, according to the first contact.

When Skippy Bedelle arrived for the long summer vacation at the family home at Gates Harbor, he arrived with a fixed program which is here detailed in the order of its importance.

1. To grow at least two inches and to acquire an added ten pounds in weight.

2. To achieve this necessary progression towards his athletic ambitions, to sleep at least fourteen hours of the day and to eat steadily and consistently during the remaining ten.

3. To impress the governor with the necessity of increasing his allowance.

4. To conceal from his mother the devastation of that portion of his wardrobe which is not a matter of public display.

5. To reduce sisters No. 1 and No. 2 to an attitude of proper respect, consistent with the approaching dignity of his sixteen years.

6. To thrash Puffy Ellis for the third consecutive summer.

7. To obtain permission for a two weeks' visit to the home of his chum, Snorky Green.

In all of which, be it observed that the feminine portion of society occupied not the slightest place.

On a radiant afternoon in mid-June, Skippy, having finished the last bar of peanut brittle and made sure that no vestige remained of the

box of assorted chocolates which had preceded it down the Great Hungry Way, assembled three comic weeklies and four magazines, gave the porter a quarter for his ostentatious devotions and descended at the station, with exactly seven cents in his pocket, having calculated his budget to a nicety.

His patent leathers were in a decidedly shabby condition and cracked over the instep, but his brown and green check suit, the yellow tie and the new panama with the purple and white band were irreproachably *bon ton*. He stood a moment supporting himself on a light bamboo cane, contemplating his dress suit-case, which he acknowledged was not up to form. Not only had the straps rotted away, but there were strange depressions and bulges in it due to the Waladoo Bird's two hundred and twenty pounds having fallen upon it. Furthermore, it was stained with the marks of a root beer orgy and Snorky Green's mistaken efforts to remove the same stains with a pumice stone.

Skippy after a moment's deliberation, decided not to insult the hackman with an offer of seven cents and having consigned the unspeakable bag to the truckman proceeded on foot twirling his cane and trying to appear unaware of the admiration of the villagers who were particularly impressed by his perfect pants.

The Bedelle homestead was a large orna-

mental, turreted and bastioned mansion, consonant with Mr. Bedelle's increasing prosperity and Mrs. Bedelle's social importance.

"Gee, the Governor certainly ought to stand for a raise," said Skippy to himself, with a proper appreciation of the velvety lawns, the flower gardens and the green and white stables. Then he remembered the none too brilliant record of the scholastic year which was sure to come up for discussion and fell into a sudden despondency.

CHAPTER XXII

Girls as an Epidemic

AS he turned up the walk, sister No. 2, aged fourteen and a half, came romping off the porch and the following conversation took place.

"Hello, Jack."

"Hello, Tootsie."

"You idiotic boy, why didn't you telegraph?"

"What 's the use? I 'm here," said Skippy to whom a quarter of a dollar was an object of reverence.

"Aren't you going to kiss me?"

Skippy glanced around.

"Oh, I suppose so."

"Good gracious, he 's got a cane!"

"Say, who let you put your hair up anyhow!"

"I 'm fifteen."

"Come off."

"I say, Jack, awful glad to see you, honest, and let 's stop fighting this summer. You help me and I 'll help you."

Skippy looked at her suspiciously.

"Getting on society airs," he thought, but out loud he announced: "All right, Tootsie, but see you don't begin. And if you want to help

out, tell the Governor to make my birthday present in cash. I 'm awfully strapped."

"Now for old Clara," he said to himself and remembering the last encounter when he had upset the gold fish over her, he braced himself for the shock. But to his profound amazement Miss Bedelle was honey itself.

"Good gracious, Jack, how big you 've grown," she said after he had submitted to the second sisterly embrace, "and such style, too! What a fascinating tie! Dad and mother are out but Sam 's just home. Come on up and see how nicely I 've arranged your room. How are you anyhow?"

"Hard up," said Skippy instantly.

"Would this help any?" said Miss Clara extracting a ten dollar bill from a well-filled purse.

Skippy gulped in astonishment.

"What 's the matter?"

"How do you mean?"

"Gee, sis, are you going to be married?"

"The idea, you funny boy!" said his sister, blushing violently. "Run on now and see Sam."

"What 's the matter with everyone anyhow?" said Skippy to himself. "There 's a reason. There certainly is a dark reason."

Still pondering over the motives for this unaccountable reception he proceeded along the hall, to the room of his heart's idol, his brother

Sam, senior at Yale and star of the nine, Sambones Bedelle, known at school as Skippy the first, about whose athletic prowesses the tradition still remained.

"Who 's that?" said the great man at the sound of his knock. "Skippy? Come in and let 's look you over."

"Hello, Sambo," said the young idol-worshipper, sidling in.

The older brother caught his hand, slapped him on the back and held him off for inspection.

"By Jove, you young rascal, you 're sprouting up fast. Whew, what a suit! Pretty strong, bub—pretty strong."

"I say, do you think—"

"Never mind. I 've worn worse. Paid for?"

"No-o—not yet."

"Anything left of the allowance?"

"Sure."

"Not possible!"

"Seven cents."

"Could you use a five spot?"

"Gee, Sam!"

"All right, all right. Pick it out over there on the bureau. How 's your conduct?"

"Pretty good."

Skippy, perched on the window-seat, watched with an approving eye the splendors that a college education had bestowed. Sam's hair parted without a rebellious ripple and lay down in perfect discipline. There never were such

immaculate white flannel trousers, such faultless buckskin shoes and tie, while the socks and the touch of handkerchief which bloomed from the breastpocket were a perfect electric blue.

"Well, Skippy, I 'll have to look you over," said Sam carelessly. "Time you had a few pointers. What did you do at school?"

"Substitute on the eleven and left field on the house nine," said Skippy, who understood at once the meaning of such an inquiry.

"First rate. Haven't started on the demon cigarette yet?"

Skippy hesitated.

"Let 's see your fingers," said the mentor, who perceiving no telltales traces of nicotine grunted a qualified approval. "Well, how much?"

"Oh, just a few whiffs now and then up the ventilator. You know how it is, Sambo!"

"Cut it out this summer. Your business is to grow. Savvy? If ever I catch you, you young whipper-snapper—"

"All right, Sam."

Skippy the first held him a moment with a stern and disciplinary eye and then relaxing, said as he contemplated the hang of his trousers before the mirror, "I hear you 've started in to be a fusser."

"Who told you that?" said Skippy with the rising inflection.

"I ran in on Turkey Reiter."

"Oh," said Skippy relaxing. "With Miss Lafontaine? That was all a put-up game!"

Sam considered him and noting the fatuous smile shook his head and said:

"Well, bub, you 're at the age when they fall fast and easy. Now listen to a few pearls of wisdom. Got your ears open?"

"Fire away, Sambo!"

"If you 've *got* to fall and you will—sure you will, don't shake your head—if you 've got to fall, don't trail around on an old woman's skirts and get treated like a dog—fetch and carry stuff. Look the field over and pick out something young and grateful. Something easy. Something that 'll look up to you. Let her love you. Be a hero. Savvy?"

"Huh! Girls give me a swift pain," said Skippy with a curl of his upper lip.

"Wait and count the pains," said Sam with a grin. "You 're at a bad age. Well, I have spoken. What 's the use of having an older brother if he can't do you some good?"

It being only four o'clock, Skippy decided to look up the Gutter Pup, who with the Egghead, represented the school contingent at Gates Harbor. Lazelle, more familiarly known as the Gutter Pup, Gazelle, Razzle-dazzle and the White Mountain Canary according to the fighting weight of the addressee, lived just across lots.

With three months' respite ahead from the

tyranny of the chapel bell, three months of home cooking, fifteen dollars in his pocket and nothing to do but to romp like a colt over pastures of his own choosing, Skippy went hilariously over the lawns, hurdled a hedge and hallooed from below the well-known window.

"Hi there, old Razzle-Dazzle, stick your head out!"

A second and a third peremptory summons bringing no response, he went cautiously around the porch.

"Why it 's Jack Bedelle," said the Gutter Pup's sister from a hammock. "Gracious, I never should have known you!"

"Hello yourself," said Skippy, acknowledging with a start the difference a year had brought to the tomboy he had known. "Say, you 've done some growing up yourself."

He ended in a long drawn out whistle which Miss Lazelle smilingly accepted as a tribute.

"I say, Bess, where 's the old Gazelle?"

"Charlie? Why he 's gone out canoeing with Kitty Rogers."

"What!"

Miss Lazelle repeated the information. Skippy was too astounded to remember his manners. He clapped his hat on his head, sunk his fists in his pockets and went out the gate. The Gutter Pup spending his time like that! He made his way to the club where more shocks awaited him. On the porch was the Egghead

feeding ice cream to Mimi Lafontaine. On the tennis courts Puffy Ellis and Tacks Brooker were playing mixed doubles! Skippy could not believe his eyes. What sort of an epidemic was this anyhow? He went inside and immediately a victrola started up a two-step and lo and behold, there before him whirling ecstatically about the floor, held in feminine embraces, were Happy Mather and Joe Crocker, the irreconcilables of the old gang!

"Hello, Skippy, shake a foot," said Happy Mather encouragingly. "Want to be introduced?"

"Excuse me," said Skippy loftily. "What 's happened to the crowd? Can't you think of anything better than wasting your time like this?"

"Wake up!" said Happy, making a dive for a partner. "You 're walking in your sleep."

Skippy went sadly out and down to the bridge where he perched on a pile and contemplated the swirling currents with melancholy. What had happened? After an hour of bitter rumination he rose heavily and engrossed in his own thoughts passed two ice-cream parlors, utterly forgetful of the sudden wealth in his pockets. On the way home he perceived something white and pink moving lightly in airy freedom, while at her side laden to the shoulder with sweaters, rugs, a camp stool and a beach umbrella was Sam. He came

rebelliously to the home porch and then hastily ducked around to the side entrance, for the porch was in full possession of Clara who was entertaining a group of men. He sought to gain his room noiselessly via the back parlor and came full upon Tootsie who was showing a book of photographs to a pudgy, red-haired boy, who blushed violently at his intrusion and stood up, until he had acknowledged the embarrassed introduction and escaped.

"What in thunder 's gotten into everybody anyhow?" he said to himself disconsolately. "Girls, girls everywhere. The place is full of them and everybody twosing, twosing! What in Sam Hill is a regular fellow to do! Gee, but it 's going to be a rotten summer!"

So in this melancholy seclusion, gazing out of his window, at the green landscape vexed by the omnipresent flash of white skirts, uneasily conscious that a crisis had arrived in his social progress that would have to be met, Skippy began to commune with himself and likewise to ruminate. His first contact with female perfidy had destroyed half his faith in woman; never again could he trust a brunette. Some day he might permit himself to be appreciated by a blonde, but it would take a lot of convincing. But it is one thing to have fixed principles and another to resist the contagions of a whole society. Virtue is one thing but loneliness is another.

"What the deuce is a regular fellow going to do?" he said. But already his resentment had given way to a brooding anxiety. All at once, he remembered that he too had loved. Something that had been dormant awoke, as the touch of spring awoke the great outdoors.

"For I must love some one,
And it may as well be you."

The refrain haunted him. Had the time come when even he would have to descend?

CHAPTER XXIII

The Blonde of the Species

SUNDAY was a nerve-racking problem in days when the New England tradition still held. There was no fishing, no tennis, no baseball, and no golf. Picnics were taboo. There was of course a large amount of eating to be done, but after fish-balls, griddle cakes, and pork and beans for breakfast, a heavy sermon, and a heavier roast beef for dinner, the long afternoon had to be lived through in a sort of penitential expiation. One dozen fed-to-bursting, painfully primped young human colts, ranging from fifteen to seventeen years of age, gathered in the Gutter Pup's barn and mournfully debated the eternal question of what to do.

"It 's too cold to sneak up to the old swimming hole," said Tacks disconsolately.

"Why not have a few rounds with the mitts?" said the Gutter Pup eagerly.

"In these duds?" said Happy Mather, who preferred to stand because when he sat down the Sunday collar pinched his throat. "Nothing doing! Thank you, but my governer's hand is still strong!"

"We might organize a Browning Society," said Puffy Ellis, who came from Boston.

"Bright boy!"

"Oh, well, since we 're all dressed up and nowhere to go, we might as well do the society racket and call on the sweet things."

"Girls!" said Skippy, sarcastically. "My aunt's cat's pants! Joe, what 's got into you? You used to be human last summer. Girls! Girls! I vote we all go out and pick a bunch of dandelions for Joe Crocker to carry round."

"Hold up," said the Gutter Pup. "You give me an idea."

"If it 's got anything to do with skirts," said Skippy, "au revoir and likewise good-by. I resign."

"Shut up! When Razzle-dazzle starts to think, give him a chance," said Happy Mather. "Who asked your opinion? You 're nothing but a tadpole, anyhow."

"Well, what 's the idea?" said Tacks.

"It 's a good one," said the Gutter Pup slowly. "It 's a gag we used to pull off in the old Murray Hill Gang, the winter I put Spider Martin away in seven rounds. Spider was no great shakes with the mitts but he had some bright ideas. This is one of them. How many are we?"

"Twelve."

"Just right. Only it 's got to be played dead serious, no horseplay, kiddin', or rough stuff."

Just half an hour later Miss Connie Brown, aged sixteen, who was yawning over a novel on

the chaise-longue of her bedroom, was electrified into action by the announcement that two gentlemen callers were waiting for her in the parlor. Miss Connie was in excellent health, weighing one hundred and sixty pounds, rather freckled, and quite accustomed to watch her girl friends enjoying themselves in the ballroom. She bounded down the stairs and arrived, slightly out of breath, to find the Gutter Pup and Skippy stiffly erect.

"Allow me to present my friend, Mr. Bedelle!" said the Gutter Pup in the correct tones of an undertaker.

Miss Connie shook hands vigorously and said, beaming with surprised delight:

"I think it 's just too darling of you to drop in. Every one 's out and I was trying to read a poky old book. We 'll have tea and there 's some chocolate cake left. Course I know your sister, Mr. Bedelle. I think she 's just the dandiest girl."

"I hope your father and mother are well," said Skippy gravely.

"What? Oh, yes! They 're all right. Let 's be cozy and camp down over here."

"And your sister?" said the Gutter Pup with equal punctiliousness.

"Sis? Oh, she 's fine and dandy," said Miss Connie, curling up on the sofa, after lighting the lamp under the tea kettle.

Skippy and the Gutter Pup after this irre-

proachable beginning, sat up stiffly and, retiring into a set silence, stared very hard at their hostess.

"You 'll have a bit of chocolate cake, won't you?" said the young lady, wondering how to open the conversation.

"Thank you."

"And you, Mr. Bedelle?"

"Thank you."

At this moment the bell rang and the maid announced:

"Mr. Mather and Mr. Crocker callin' on you, Miss Connie."

Miss Brown could not believe her ears. Such a thing had never happened before, even in her happiest dreams. If her sister could only see her now! She gave a hurried calculating glance at the chocolate cake and went joyfully more than halfway to meet the new arrivals. The four conspirators, after formal greetings, ranged themselves in a semicircle, stiffly balanced on the edges of their chairs, hands on their knees, and waited for their hostess to play with the conversation.

"Did you see Maude Adams in her new piece this spring?" said Miss Connie, who began to fidget with the cups and carefully cut the cake into five exact divisions.

As this question was addressed to the company in general, the four visitors maintained a frozen attention.

"I 'm just crazy about Maude Adams. I went three times," said Miss Connie, who found that five teacups choked up the table in the most disconcerting way. "You like Maude Adams, don't you — er — Mr. Mather?"

"I like Maude Adams."

"And you, Mr. Brooker?"

"I like Maude Adams."

Miss Connie was staring at the teapot desperately, seeking for some new topic of conversation, when again the bell rang and two more callers were announced. Miss Connie's Cinderella-like enthusiasm gave way to a feeling of panic. She whispered hoarsely to the maid to bring two more cups and surreptitiously made a new allotment of the chocolate cake. The new arrivals inquired solemnly after the health of Miss Connie's mother, father and sister, and then joined the expectant silence. When the young lady in turn had discovered that the new callers liked Maude Adams, all mental processes came to an end and the sound of the clock from the mantel fell like the blows of a hammer in the room.

When the fourth relay arrived, her complexion took on a bright red tinge and her agitation was such that she poured the cream into the cake and broke two cups.

"Did you see her?" said the Gutter Pup ecstatically, after they had allowed the pent-up hilarity to die out behind the sheltering hedge.

"Skippy, old top, when that last bunch arrived, I thought she certainly was going down for the count."

"Her eyes were jumping and she was breathing like a horse."

"Well, how do you like the idea?"

"Best Sunday afternoon I ever spent."

"Where away now?"

"I 'd like to work it on Tootsie."

"Hold up—my sister needs it more than yours."

The point was debated and as no decision could be reached it was decided to keep to the regular program. The afternoon was a huge success from the point of view of the male phalanx. The destruction was enormous. One or two young ladies held out until the fifth relay but almost collapsed at the fourth.

"'Course they 'll all get together to-morrow and have it in for us," said the Gutter Pup, chortling. "But never mind, it was worth it. Did you ever see anything as idiotically solemn as Tacks Brooker? When he arrives they certainly throw up the sponge."

"Have we time for another?"

"Sure, it 's only a quarter of six. We 'll put this one over hard, for she certainly needs taking down."

"Who?"

"Dolly Travers. Don't know her? You will."

Miss Dolly Travers received them with the manner of a Dresden shepherdess just stepping from the mantelpiece and Skippy took the petite hand gingerly, as though afraid that anything so delicate and brittle would break at the touch. The voice of his brother's worldly wisdom seemed to sound in his ears:

"Pick out something young and grateful. Be a hero."

Miss Travers was undeniably young, if artful, and moreover she was not of the dark and deceptive class of brunettes, but a blonde, with eyes as open and guileless as the blue of the June day. She had solved the problem of the classification which as naturally marks the feminine progress as long trousers indicates the man, by bobbing her hair; and, though the subterfuge seemed to afford much amusement to certain of her sex, it immediately separated her from the pigtails.

There was something about her that appealed instantly to Skippy and inspired confidence, something cool and dainty and at ease. She did not express either surprise or excessive delight at their entrance. There was something simple and frank about everything she did. He appreciated it and fell to wishing that Tootsie would be more like her, less coquettish and more of a good comrade.

"Well, what do you know?" said Dolly, looking at the Gutter Pup.

"Nothing."

"I hope your mother and father are well," said Skippy, true to the formula.

"Gracious! Are you trying to make conversation?" said Dolly, beginning to laugh, "Don't sit on the edge of your chairs, boys, like monkeys on a stick; sit back and be comfortable."

Happy Mather and Tacks appeared with gloomy ceremony.

"Is this the first time you ever paid a call?" said the young lady when Happy had opened the question of the family health. "What is the matter with you boys? You look too ridiculous for words; sit back, stick your hands in your pockets, and look natural."

Again the bell rang and the sounds of the third relay were heard in the hall. Miss Dolly glanced quickly at the four solemnities and then suspiciously out of the window where relays four and five were lurking under the trees, suppressed a smile, and came to a sudden decision.

"My mother and father are in perfect health, my sister is in perfect health, how are yours?" she said, as Puffy Ellis started to clear his throat. "No, no, don't sit down. You 're much too imposing. Mr. Crocker, you take one side of the fireplace and Mr. Ellis the other, and please don't look so gawky. You are n't really afraid of one little girl, are you? And by the

way, Charlie Lazelle, go out on the porch and call in the others."

"Others?" said the Gutter Pup, trying to save the day by his cat-and-cream expression.

"The others who are hiding under the willow," said Dolly lightly. "Hurry up, because it 's six o'clock and Daddy will be back any moment. He 's such a bear about the boys I go with. It 's a marvelous chance for him to look you over. Joe Crocker, sit down at the piano."

"On Sunday?" said Joe, startled out of his attitude.

"Don't worry, we 're not going to dance. We 're going to make a good impression on father."

When Mr. Travers drew up ten minutes later he beheld eleven sheepish young gentlemen huddled in a circle in the middle of the parlor intoning from hymnbooks the measures which Joe Crocker pounded out from the piano under the solemn inspection of Miss Dolly Travers.

"Great heavens! What 's this?" said Mr. Travers, who was the most unorthodox of men. "What in mischief are you up to now?"

"It 's my Sunday School class," said the young lady, with difficult seriousness. "We 're meeting every week. It won't annoy you too much, will it, father?"

CHAPTER XXIV

Result of a Brother's Advice

THE first dance of the summer took place the following Saturday, and the entire feminine contingent immediately declared war on Miss Dolly Travers, who entered escorted by four cavaliers and subdivided each dance.

While others more fortunately endowed with rhythmic feet swayed and circled about the ballroom with the little Dresden china blonde, Skippy, who guarded in his arms a pink and white filmy scarf, glowered across the vacant chair at Puffy Ellis, who had been favored with the safekeeping of the favorite's fan.

"Jack, you 're perfectly ridiculous," said Sister Clara, who did not relish the competition. "The idea of making a fool of yourself over a child of twelve that ought to be in bed long ago. Have n't you any pride?"

"Kitty, kitty," said Skippy softly. He could not be bothered with such things as sisters. His mind was made up. He glared over at Puffy and said to himself: "To-night I 'll give him his choice. Either he gets off the horizon, or I tear the hide off him."

He would protect his rights in the good old-fashioned way, even if he had to thrash a dozen of them!

"Why, Jack!" said Dolly, whirling up at this moment, and sinking back into the scarf which he hurriedly draped about her. "You look like blood and thunder. You 're not jealous, are you?"

"Oh, no!"

"Well then?"

"Why did you give Puffy Ellis that fan?"

"Poor Puffy! He does n't dance, either."

"Lord, I 'll dance by next Saturday," said Skippy miserably, "or break a leg."

"Foolish boy, of course you must dance! If I sit this out with you, will it make you feel any better?"

"Will it!"

"We 'll go on the porch and you 'll try a one-step. Oh, no one will see. Gracious! Don't look so terrified."

Skippy's answer was something between a gulp and a gurgle.

"Don't you want *me* to teach you?" said Dolly in the velvetiest voice in the world.

"I 'll try; I 'll try anything you say," he said, breathing hard, "only I say, Dolly, remember a carthorse has done more dancing than I ever have."

"The two-step is frightfully easy — you 'll see," said the young lady when they had reached the dark end of the piazza. "It 's just one-two to music. Put your arm around me?"

"What?"

"You goose! How can you dance if you don't?" said Dolly in a cool professional manner. "Take my hand. So! Now just walk in rhythm."

When Skippy for the first time in his life had actually closed his arm around a feminine waist and clutched at the outstretched hand, he had a sensation of terrifying dizziness, such as had once overcome him when on a dare he had poised himself thirty feet in the air for his first high dive.

"Begin! One, two, left foot, to the music!"

Skippy blindly and obediently began to walk. He walked all over the little feet. He walked on his own. He walked into a chair and ricocheted from a table with a bump that bounced them off the railing.

"That 's enough!" said Dolly in a slightly discouraged voice. "Gracious! You must n't grab me like that. You 're not drowning."

"Drowning's nothing to this," said Skippy, rubbing his forehead "You see it 's hopeless."

"Of course it is n't hopeless. If that great big lummox of a Tacks Brooker can dance are n't you ashamed of yourself to give up like that?"

"I 'll never dance another step," said Skippy sulkily.

"The idea, Jack Bedelle! I want you to dance, and dance you shall!" said Dolly, stamping her foot. "Do you understand?"

"Don't rub it in, Dolly."

"Foolish boy!" said the young lady, squeezing his arm. "Do you think I want to dance all summer long with *other* men?"

Three-quarters of an hour later Skippy again, but alone, reached the protecting shadows. Again the orchestra was beating out an exhilarating measure.

"You bet I 'm not going to let her dance with other men," he said under his breath. He balanced carefully, stretched out one arm to encircle an imaginary waist and started heavily to tread the illusive measure. Suddenly he realized that he was not alone. Farther down a couple were swaying in the shadows. Then Dolly's voice reached him.

"The idea! Puffy, of course you can dance. If Jack Bedelle can learn, you ought to be ashamed to give up."

"Skippy dance!"

"Of course, foolish boy! Do you want to sit and watch him dance with me *all* summer?"

That evening after he had escorted the triumphant Dolly Travers home in company of four other victims, Skippy went heavily upward to his room.

"Hello there!" said the big brother from his bed.

"Hello, Sambo," said Skippy, slinking in disconsolately.

"What 's the matter, bub? You look like a

He balanced carefully, stretched out one arm to encircle an imaginary waist. *Page* 172

plucked chicken. You 've been moping around for a week. What is the matter with you anyhow?"

"What is the matter?" said Skippy, staring at him.

"Exactly, what is the matter?"

"The matter is, I took your advice," said Skippy reproachfully. "You told me to pick out something young and easy."

"Well?"

"Well, I did it," said Skippy, who then, without noticing Mr. Sam's growing interest, began to unburden himself.

Three days later, about five in the afternoon, Skippy emerged from behind the Gutter Pup's barn, leaving Mr. Puffy Ellis to readjust himself with more painful leisure. Skippy was somewhat bruised himself, and his clothes were a sight to behold, but he was happy. Mr. Puffy Ellis had finally seen the light and one obstacle at least had been removed from the summer.

"I may not be much shakes on my feet as yet," said Skippy to himself grimly, "but thank the Lord I can use my fists." He remembered certain gorgeous passages in "The Count of Monte Cristo" and, thinking of what still remained to be done, said tragically, "So much for *one!*"

Suddenly, in front of the Travers home, he beheld a buckboard draw up, and as with rising

anger he pressed forward for a view of the next rival, Miss Dolly Travers tripped down, gave her hand delightedly, and sprang to the seat.

Another rival, another Puffy Ellis to crush! Unmindful of anything but his consuming jealousy, he strode forward, fists doubled and glowering. The next moment the carriage had swung up and passed him. Miss Dolly Travers, blissfully entranced with her new conquest, had not even noticed him, standing there humbly in the road! But worse than that — oh, perfidy of perfidies — at the reins was no other than the great man of the university, his brother Mr. Sambones Bedelle!

CHAPTER XXV

Antics of a Talking Machine

TOOTSIE BEDELLE, in the days following the opening of the summer season at Gates Harbor, was considerably mystified by the actions of the family phonograph. Now while a talking machine is admittedly endowed with one human attribute, it is supposed to be a talking and not a walking machine. Yet unless it were endowed with motive power, how explain the sudden oddities of its appearances and disappearances?

The evening after the first hop at the club, Tootsie broke upon the family dinner table with the frantic announcement:

"The phonograph's gone! Stolen!"

"Stolen!" said Skippy incredulously.

"Stolen!" said Mr. Bedelle with his eat 'em alive expression.

"Why it was there this morning," said Clara.

"Well, it 's not there now and it was n't there this afternoon!"

The entire Bedelle family broke for the parlor. There in its accustomed corner was the phonograph. When quiet had been restored Tootsie again announced.

"It was *not* there this afternoon!"

"Who was there, Tootsie dear?" said Clara maliciously.

Tootsie's reply woke up Mr. Bedelle, who considered himself a nervous dyspeptic and, being already in a state of antidigestive excitation, glowered and imposed silence on the entire younger generation.

"Well, it 's *my* phonograph, anyhow!" said Tootsie sulkily, and dinner over she hastened to the parlor. The phonograph was still there. She went to bed a little shaken in her convictions. But the next morning, returning early from the beach, she happened to glance into the parlor. The phonograph had disappeared again! Tootsie could not believe her eyes. She advanced cautiously and felt with both hands, but her groping fingers encountered nothing but thin air. Then she searched behind the curtains, moved the furniture and opened all the hall closets. There was no question about it this time, the phonograph certainly had vanished from the house!

Half an hour later, as Mr. and Mrs. Bedelle were sauntering back from the morning plunge, the frantic figure of Miss Tootsie came flying down the road.

"Good gracious, Tootsie! What *has* happened?" exclaimed Mrs. Bedelle, trying to remember whether the dioxygen and the bandages had been unpacked.

"It 's gone!"

"Gone? What, who, where?"

"The phonograph's gone again."

"Now Tootsie," said Mr. Bedelle, elevating a cautionary finger.

"Don't agitate yourself, John," said Mrs. Bedelle.

"Father, it is gone! I saw it!"

"Saw it?"

"I mean I saw it was n't there and I searched everywhere. I saw it with my own eyes," said Tootsie incoherently, and between rage and tears she repeated her account in a manner to be completely unintelligible. Mr. Bedelle was a theorist afflicted with indigestion. He carefully selected his diet with due regard for starch values and never ate a raw tomato without first carefully removing the seeds. He was likewise particularly careful never to sit down to a process of digestion in an agitated mood. His irritation therefore considerably aggravated by his daughter's case of nerves, he hastened on to the house.

"I looked everywhere, Daddy, honest I did and it—" Suddenly Tootsie stopped and her jaw fell. There in its accustomed place, reposing on the table, was the phonograph.

"Tootsie!" said Mr. Bedelle in puffy rage.

"Yes, Daddy."

"Go to that machine. Put your hand on it. Feel it. Is it or is it not a phonograph?"

"It is."

"Is it yours?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"Write out fifty times 'I must not get excited before mealtime.' Don't leave the house until you have done it."

"Very well, Daddy."

Mr. Bedelle went to his easy-chair on the back porch and began to fan himself. Tootsie, staring at the phonograph, began seriously to consider. Her suspicions were aroused and her first suspicion was the instinctive one of sister to sister.

"Good gracious! I believe the child thinks I did it," said Clara, at luncheon, after Tootsie's stare had remained in fixed accusation upon her.

"Not a word! Not another word about that phonograph," said Mr. Bedelle wrathfully. "If this whole family has got to be upset every time I sit down to the table, I will have the whole thing made into mincemeat."

"Well, it 's my phonograph," said Tootsie sullenly, and immediately departed for her room — by request.

For two days the phonograph remained quiescent, but about this time Miss Clara Bedelle announced that some one had been tampering with her figure.

"Your figure, Clara? How shocking!" said the older brother.

"My dressmaker's figure, and what 's more,

some one," said Clara, looking hard at Tootsie, "*Some one* has been in my closet and disturbed my dresses!"

"How *very* strange," said Tootsie sarcastically. "Are you sure it is n't your imagination — child?"

"And I know who did it."

"Perhaps you know, too, who stole my phonograph," said Tootsie angrily.

The next afternoon the phonograph departed for four hours. Tootsie searched her sister's bedroom and then called Skippy into consultation.

"It 's Clara all right," said Skippy. "We must set a watch on her."

"She has a mean and spiteful nature. She does it just to get me punished."

"Leave it to me."

"What will you do?"

"Say, what 's it worth?"

"What do you mean?"

"What do I get if I catch her red hot?"

"I 'll give a dollar," said Tootsie recklessly.

"That 's too much," said Skippy, with an appearance of generosity. "I 'll sleuth for a quarter a day. Cash in advance. But my orders go. Savvy?"

Tootsie paid down the fee, and following instructions departed next morning with the family for the beach, while Skippy, returning across lots, wriggled on his stomach over the

lawn and slipped into the house by the cellar window. For three days Tootsie duly paid out her quarter and received the most comforting of reports. On the fourth day, however, a discussion arose.

"'Course if you sit there, no one 's goin' to come," she said, fingering her last quarter. "I know it 's Clara by the look in her eyes."

"Sit there! What kind of a sleuth do you think I am?" he said indignantly. "Look here. See that phonograph—see anything queer about it? Pick it up."

Instantly the grating sounds of a dinner bell were heard and a horrible crash.

"Look out! Don't drop it, you chump! See that string that passes down the back of the wall and into the closet?" said Skippy, proudly exhibiting a patent alarm which he had constructed with the aid of a delicately balanced dishpan. "I 'm in the dining-room under the table. Well what?"

"Heavens! If Daddy ever sets that off!"

"He won't. You bet, I 'll see to that," said Skippy hastily. "Well what? Do I get another quarter?"

There was a slight mental indecision after which the quarter came reluctantly to the detective. Tootsie went thoughtfully down to the beach. The new method did redound to the stability of the phonograph, but was Skippy really working as rapidly as he could?

"I should have offered a dollar and no more," said Tootsie to herself. "If this keeps up I 'll be broke in a week."

So distressing was this outlook, that her mind refused to be diverted, and after a brief hesitation she returned to the house, intent on a more satisfactory financial arrangement. Now Tootsie was as fond of mystery stories as Skippy himself, and so with due regard to etiquette she dodged down the hedge, slunk behind the lilacs, and noiselessly let herself into the dining-room window. Then, cautiously, on hands and knees, she approached the mysteries of the dining-room table, behind the red cloth of which Skippy was to be waiting.

"Hist! It 's me," she said in a wary whisper. Then, having consumed ten minutes in moving six feet serpent fashion across the creaky floor, she gained the table. Skippy was not there. She rose violently, bumping her head, scrambled out and rushed into the parlor. The phonograph likewise had disappeared.

"He 's on the trail at last," she thought excitedly. "Hurray!"

But at that precise moment the strangest of strange, uncanny sounds was heard. Tootsie stood stock still and listened with a pumping heart. There was no question about it, the phonograph was gone, yet faintly, like a sinking moan, she heard, she was sure she heard, the thin, tinny sounds of a Sousa two-step. The

room was dim, the house deserted. For one brief moment she stood panic-stricken, poised for flight. Then she shook her head angrily.

"Fiddlesticks, phonographs don't have ghosts!"

And listening more intently, she gradually located the familiar strains as coming from the distant carriage house. In a fever of expectancy Tootsie flew across the lawns and gained the open door. Above her the phonograph was pumping out the thrilling measures of the latest two-step, but what puzzled her immediately were the scuffling, shifting sounds, like a scurry of rats, which accompanied it. Then a suspicion of the truth came to her and she tiptoed up the stairs. On the open floor Skippy with his arms about a strange shape was painfully treading in and out of a maze which, with a bench, a barrel and two chairs, he had arranged to visualize the perils of the ballroom.

"Thief!"

Skippy started, shied into the bench and went over backwards while the partner of his arms, escaping, rolled over towards Tootsie, discovering under Clara's best organdie dress the net-work of wire which made up the missing dressmaker's form!

The partner of his arms, escaping, rolled over towards Tootsie. *Page* 182

CHAPTER XXVI

Containing Some High Melodrama

THERE are great moments in life when the acquired veneer of society drops away and human beings revert to type. Tootsie lay down on her back and kicked her legs in the air, howling with glee. Skippy, disentangling himself from the bench, rose with slow deliberation. He saw that he faced a crisis. If Tootsie, now rolling before him in hysterical agony, ever was allowed to tell such a story as this, there would be no future for John C. Bedelle but to ship before the mast. Skippy thought hard and Skippy had the instincts of a diplomat. He decided to begin with a light conciliatory manner.

"Well, Tootsie, old girl, you 've got the goods on me. What 's your price?"

Tootsie's reply was a succession of hysterical gasps that sounded like a child with the whooping cough laughing over a comic section.

"What 's your price?" Skippy repeated more firmly, but striving to maintain a sickly smile.

"OW! OW! OW!" said Tootsie, holding in her sides.

Skippy began to be alarmed. He thought a moment and then carefully removed the dressmaker's form and hid it behind a packing-case.

But the sight of Skippy's dancing companion brought forth a fresh attack of hysterics. Then he had recourse to water and a dripping oily sponge. The sight of this so affected Tootsie that she rose precipitately and staggered to a chair. Skippy at once abandoned the sponge and sympathetically proffered his handkerchief.

"It 's goin' to cost me a lot of money," he thought, considering her with anxiety. He had fifteen dollars stowed away with the intention of adding it to the cash returns of his approaching birthday and acquiring his first dress suit. He made a mental surrender and advancing to the somewhat calmer Tootsie, a third time asked:

"Well, come on! What 's your price?"

"Thief!" said Tootsie, all at once remembering her grievance.

"Oh, I say, can't you take a joke?"

"A joke! Wait 'll I get even with you, Mr. Smarty!"

"Go easy. Name your terms."

"And I paid you to watch it!" said Tootsie, whose anger began to rise as her respiration returned.

Skippy mournfully admitted to himself that this had been an unnecessary aggravation.

"Shucks! You did n't think I was going to keep the money, did you?" he said, bringing out a dollar bill and tendering it humbly.

Tootsie put the bill from her with the gesture of a tragedy queen, stood up, straightened her skirt and said:

"Just you wait, thief!"

"What are you going to do?"

"My business."

"You 're not going to tell?" said Skippy, who had no doubt of her intention.

"Oh dear no! Oh no indeed!" said Tootsie, moving to depart.

Skippy sprang ahead, slammed the door, locked it and pocketed the key.

"What good does that do?" said Tootsie disdainfully.

"You 'll not leave this room until you swear a solemn oath," said Skippy desperately.

"All right, I guess I can wait if you can," said Tootsie, settling down. "But I pity you when Dad gets hold of you — thief!"

Skippy deliberated, resolved on anything short of murder to stifle the threatening exposure. Sterner methods were necessary. All at once his eye spied a coil of rope in the corner and he sprang to it with a shout.

"What are you going to do?" said Tootsie wrathfully.

"I am going to tie and gag and leave you to starve," said Skippy, swinging a lasso.

There was a short and painful tussle in which his necktie was torn to shreds and he surrendered a certain amount of hair, but at the end

of which, Miss Tootsie, tied hand and foot to a chair, was propped up against a pillar, while her conqueror proceeded to roll up his handkerchief with the evident intention of applying a gag.

"You 'll like it when the rats come around," he said gloomily.

"Fiddlesticks! You can't scare me," said Tootsie with alarming calm.

"And there are bats too, don't forget the bats that get their claws in your hair," said Skippy, approaching with the gag, "and not a soul to hear your cries, you tattle-tale!"

"You 'll get the licking of your life," said Tootsie, looking at him steadily. "Thief!"

"So you won't name your price?" said Skippy, passing behind her and holding the gag before her eyes.

"Not if you murder me — you thief!"

Skippy again considered.

"She does n't scare worth a darn," he acknowledged to himself. Instead of applying the gag he departed to the opposite side, sat down and began to think. At the end of a long moment he rose and approached her with a brisk set manner.

"So you 're going to tell, are you?"

"You just bet I 'm going to tell, you coward!"

"All right, tell then!" He stooped, freed her legs and arms and rose. "Tell if you 've

made up your mind to — but God help you if you do. That 's all I have to say."

"You can't scare me," said Tootsie, but already intrigued by the new plan of action which she divined behind her brother's silence.

"No, but there 's some one I can scare!" said Skippy, unlocking the door. "All right! War to the knife, Miss Tootsie! Remember, though, I warned you!"

" Who are you threatening now? " said Tootsie, trying to conceal her anxiety; for long association had engendered a lively respect for the Skippy imagination.

"I never threaten," said Skippy disdainfully, "but if that red-haired, knock-kneed, overfed beau of yours ever sets foot on this place again, he comes in a hearse! And what goes for him, goes for all! Go on and tell, but you 'll have the loneliest summer you 've ever had, young lady!"

Five minutes later a treaty of peace was concluded on the basis of secret understandings secretly arrived at, and Miss Tootsie Bedelle replaced the dressmaker's figure in the arms of the triumphant diplomat while the phonograph gave forth the strains of the Washington Post.

Tootsie's terpsichorean assistance was sorely needed. Skippy was not a natural glider and gliding as Tootsie explained to him was essential in a ballroom, in polite society at least.

Skippy's feet could skip, hop and jump with the best, but they were not, in any sense of the word, gliders. The change from the inanimate embrace of the dressmaker's form to Tootsie's pliant figure, however, worked such miracles that at the end of twenty minutes' industrious application, Tootsie expressed herself as astonished and delighted.

Now of course Skippy could have gone for instruction to Dolly Travers, who was the object of these secret efforts. But that was not the Skippy way. He had always shunned any exhibition of inferiority. Whatever was to be learned he learned in privacy and exhibited in public. He had taught himself to shoot marbles, to solve the intricate sequences of mumblety peg, to throw an out-curve, to pick up a double hitch with one hand, to chin himself, skin the cat and hang by his toes behind the safe seclusion of the barn wall. Whatever his failures they were not accompanied by the jeers of an audience. He had gone off in secret to the swimming pool by Bretton's creek and smarted for hours under crashing belly-whoppers until he had taught himself to dive forward and backward. Then he watched with grinning superiority the fate of less experienced youngsters who followed his dare.

So in the present sentimental crisis. To rank in the estimation of Miss Dolly Travers there was no escaping the fact that he would have

to surrender his prejudices and incline his feet to the popular way. But having reached this decision he determined to stage his effects. For two more Saturdays he continued in dignified isolation to escort Miss Travers to the weekly hop and back, guarding her scarf and fan, straining his mouth into the semblance of an interested smile while other fellows slipped their arms around the tiny figure and moved dexterously or heavily about the ballroom.

On the third Saturday, halfway to the club house, just as he had planned, Miss Dolly returned to the point of discussion.

"Jack, aren't you ever, ever going to learn to dance?"

"Oh well, perhaps some day," he said casually.

"But you can't go through life without dancing!"

"Oh no, of course not."

"Really I think it's just too selfish of you. You know how I adore it. Why won't you try? I do believe you're afraid of being laughed at."

Skippy smiled craftily to himself.

"Well, perhaps I'll have a try."

"That's what you've said every time," said Miss Dolly, shrugging her shoulders.

Skippy bided his opportunity until the third two-step had begun and the claimants for the favorite's hand were congregating.

"I 'm sitting this out with Jack," said Dolly, with a sigh.

"Say, a fossil who can't dance ought n't to have any rights around here, nohow," said Happy Mather. "You 're only a clothes horse anyway, Skippy."

Dolly burst out laughing at this, which pained Skippy exceedingly.

"Oh, any chump can dance if he wants to."

"You think so?"

"Sure. Easiest thing in the world if I wanted to."

"Easy?"

"Sure. Just keeping in time, that 's all."

"Here 's a dollar you can't get three times around the room."

Skippy pretended to hesitate.

"I 'll pay another dollar any day to see a circus," said Joe Crocker, beginning to smirk.

"Dolly, hold the money," said Skippy.

Miss Dolly looked up in some consternation for the group now numbered a half a dozen and the floor was vast and bare.

"Don't you want to wait a little?" she said with a glance at Crocker, who was nudging his neighbor.

"What 's the use?" said Skippy. "Now tell me again what I do."

"Two steps with the left forward and then two steps with the right. Hold my arm so," said Dolly a little breathlessly.

"Hold on tight, Skippy," said Happy Mather.

"Step on your own feet."

"Balance on your heels."

"Don't let them rattle you, Jack."

"They can't. Which foot do I start on?"

"The left."

"Shall we give him a push, Dolly?" said Lazelle sympathetically, while his companions, linking arms, were beaming with anticipated delight.

Skippy, having properly worked up his audience, nodded to his partner and floated off in a perfect dancing style.

"Jack, you wretch, you 've danced for years!" said Dolly after the first surprise had passed. "You 've just been making fun of me all this time."

"Never been on a ballroom floor before in my life," said Skippy, keeping within the letter of the truth.

"Why you 're wonderful, Jack! But then how could you —"

"It 's mental, everything is mental," said Skippy conceitedly. "I just watched till I got it in my mind and the rest was easy. Thanks for the long green. Hello, what 's become of our little gallery of nuts?"

Whether or not Dolly was entirely convinced by this casual explanation, the immediate return to Skippy was enormous. Not only were the claimants to her affections completely dis-

tanced, but Miss Dolly, for a time, adopted an attitude of respect and deference towards him, which had formerly been totally lacking.

Skippy was tremendously in love. There was no doubt about that. You could see it in the dishpan glow of his scrubbed forehead, in the spotless flannels and the lily white hands. There was something secure and permanent in the attachment. Dolly was not sentimental and only distantly affectionate, but she was absorbing. There was no question of an eight-hour day in his case. From nine A.M. until Mr. Travers ostentatiously began to bar the library windows for the night, Mr. Skippy Bedelle was at one end of a wire with Miss Dolly Travers at the other, pushing the button.

That practical young lady, realizing that Skippy's earning capacity was still woefully limited, permitted no allusions to the distant holy bonds of matrimony, but she did allow him to mortgage his future to the extent of the promenade and dances which would decorate his scholastic and collegiate journey, as well as attendance at all athletic contests of any nature whatsoever. On his birthday (when the sinking fund toward the first dress suit rose to the colossal sum of fifty dollars) they solemnly exchanged pins, Dolly openly sporting the red and black of Lawrenceville, while Skippy concealed in the secret recesses of his tie a little gold wishbone which would lead him to the

higher prizes in life, add three inches to his stature and the additional twenty pounds necessary to qualify for the varsity.

His fall from grace was of course the subject of great merriment among his companions, particularly Happy Mather and Joe Crocker in whom memory still rankled. A direct insult was of course dangerous, but there were other subtler ways. At least half a dozen times a day some one was sure to ask him,

"I say, Skippy, what 's doing to-night?"

"Got anything on this afternoon?"

But Skippy brushed aside their crude attempts at persiflage with indifference. He had won out. The courted prize was his. For two weeks not a cloud obtruded on the clear sky of his content. Dolly bullied and bossed him. He did her errands. He fetched and carried. He served her and no other goddess. And then tragedy arrived with the arrival of the celebrated Hickey Hicks, who came down to spend a fortnight with the Triumphant Egghead.

CHAPTER XXVII

Hickey in a Deadly Rôle

HICKEY, be it remembered, had just severed his connections with the Lawrenceville school after a display of pedagogical despotism which had no parallel except in the case of the celebrated Captain Dreyfus. Just because certain disturbing incidents had occurred in close succession, beginning with the theft of the clapper; the disappearance of Tabby's bed, when that inexperienced young master had dashed two miles down the Trenton road in search of fictitious burglars; the famous Fed and anti-Fed riots when a misdirected effort to inculcate the love of politics had almost resulted in a recourse to the financial institution which insures the school against destruction by fire or otherwise — the head master, without an iota of evidence (he acknowledged it frankly), had requested the Hon. Hickey Hicks to seek a wider field for the admittedly fertile powers which were peculiarly his.

When Hickey with his resplendent social manner cast the eye of favor on Dolly Travers, after having remarked her unquestioned superiority with the light fantastic toe, Skippy felt exactly the way the Vicomte de Bragelonne did when royalty appeared to claim the hand of

Louise de la Vallière. Hickey was in the heavy middleweight class while he was still a bantam. Hickey was one of the princely figures of school tradition. He came, he saw, he conquered. He was an athlete, whose arrival was disputed by the three leading colleges. Sambones Bedelle himself, captain of next year's Yale varsity nine, allowed himself to be seen publicly with his arm resting affectionately over Hickey's shoulders. With such a halo it was no wonder that Dolly in her early teens should have yielded to the flattery of his preference. Skippy acknowledged so much to himself as he stood on the fringe of the spectators and watched Dolly with rapturous upturned face whirling about the room in the arms of the great man.

"What ye doin' to-morrow afternoon, Skippy?" said Puffy Ellis, who enjoyed the reversal of rôles.

"I 'm cleaning up the mitts. Want to come around?" said Skippy, with what is commonly described as a steely look.

Puffy did not pursue the subject and the chip on Skippy's shoulder remained unchallenged.

How Hickey danced! The days had not arrived when acrobatic feats had invaded the decorum of the ballroom, and such simple departures from the routine as dos-à-dos and single hand were enough to provoke envy and astonishment.

Skippy forgot his irritation as he watched

the graceful guiding of his rival. Hickey certainly could dance! He admitted it. Never with or without the assistance of a dressmaker's manikin could he ever hope to rival him in this accomplishment. He went dutifully to claim his turn with the faithless one. His heart was acutely torn and he knew the peculiar delight he was affording his numerous friends, but he forced a smile of indifference. Besides, in his fertile imagination he had the glimmerings of a stratagem.

"I 've saved the fifth two-step and the seventh waltz for you," said Dolly, squeezing his arm ever so lightly, "though you have n't asked me yet."

The summer was long and she was quite aware that in another ten days the resplendent Mr. Hicks would pass as Shelley had passed. Besides she secretly admired Skippy's sporting manner in adversity.

"Awfully good of you," he said lightly, "but see here, Dolly, don't bother about me. Hickey's got us all skinned hollow when it comes to this game. Go ahead, keep on dancing with him. Go as far as you like."

"My, but he waltzes divinely!" said Dolly, relieved.

"He 's a wonder, all right, and a crackerjack at anything he touches! Sambones says he 'll make the varsity, certain next year."

"What happened about his leaving school?"

"That — that was an outrage," said Skippy, who would have scorned to attack a rival meanly. "I 'll tell you all about that."

"You 're sure you don't mind my dancing so much with him?" said Dolly, who had allowed Hickey to cut in six dances running.

"I? Bless you, no!"

"It 's just his wonderful dancing," said Dolly, looking down.

"Don't blame you. He is A No. 1 with his feet all right," said Skippy, and he added carelessly, "wonderful how he manages it, too, with his infirmity."

"His infirmity?" said Dolly, startled.

"Did I say infirmity?" said Skippy, pretending surprise. "For heaven's sake, don't tell any one. Gee, I should n't have said that."

"Yes, but what infirmity?" said Dolly, now in a high state of excitement.

Skippy compressed his lips to show that they were forever sealed, and moved away. But he noted with satisfaction that the next time Miss Dolly Travers passed whirling about the great man, instead of the rapturous upturned gaze, was one of alarmed curiosity.

The next day at the beach Dolly opened up at once the question of infirmities.

"Dolly," said Skippy firmly, "I 'm not going to say any more, so it 's no use trying to pump me. I 'm ashamed to have said what I did. A feller can't help what he 's got, or what he

has n't got, can he? And it 's only a foolish prejudice after all."

"But Jack—"

"There was another fellow at school," said Skippy, without attention, "who had a glass eye, but he was a positive nuisance. He used to take it out and leave it around. No one could stand roomin' with him. It certainly gave you the creeps to be lookin' on the table for a collar button or a pen and find—"

But here Dolly gave a shriek and fled with her hands over her ears.

Now Skippy had made no direct insinuation (he always had the greatest respect for the letter of the truth), but it is a fact that when forty-eight hours later the Mathers gave a dance, Hickey became suddenly aware of a complete change of attitude among the feminine portion of his admirers.

"What the deuce is wrong with me, anyhow?" he said after the second dance. He went outside and scrupulously examined himself in the mirror. Then he went back and tried another partner. Again the strange feeling stole over him. Every time he brought the battery of his blue eyes to bear upon his partner her eyes turned uneasily away and the moment his own glance was averted, back hers came, in an uncanny fixed interrogation. The night was a triumph for Skippy, who danced eight times with Miss Dolly Travers and had the further

satisfaction of observing her in a state of nerves after each of the two which she begrudged to Mr. Hicks.

But alas for Skippy and his short moment of triumph! Within twenty-four hours the mystified Hickey had discovered the truth and Hickey was one that was never lightly challenged.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Sitting It Out

SKIPPY, fatuously unconscious of any overtaking fate, escorted Dolly to the next Saturday night hop. On Monday Mr. Hickey Hicks would be on his way to new pastures and life would return to simpler terms. Dolly, however, was in no amiable frame of mind.

"You said he had a glass eye. You know you did," she said for the tenth time.

"Now that 's just like a woman," thought Skippy, justly offended, and out loud he said, with some asperity, "*You* said so. I never did."

"I?"

"Sure, you did! Why you said it was the left one."

"Well, you let me think so anyway."

"How was I to know?" said Skippy, illogically. "Perhaps he has a glass eye. Have you asked him?"

They reached the club house and as the orchestra was already industriously at work, Skippy said playfully,

"All 's fair in love and war anyhow! S'pose we dance."

"You don't deserve it," said Dolly, hesi-

tating. She glanced around and as no one else was an immediate prospect, she accorded him her arm. Skippy began to perceive that the burden of conversation would lie with him.

The next dance was a waltz and they waited, the one expectantly, the other in resignation for the usual rush of the stags which invariably accompanied Miss Dolly's conquering arrival. As she was endowed with a lively sense of humor, her irritation had quite departed and Skippy was as blissfully happy in his restoration to favor as the four-footed puppy when reconciliation with the master has followed chastisement. To keep fidelity with human nature, it must likewise be recorded that the practical sense was likewise strong in the young lady, who was fully aware of the value of a bird in the hand to one about to fly the bush. Hickey appeared and came directly towards them. Skippy fell back.

"Hello, Skippy, old top," said Hickey, with accented cordiality. He shook hands with Miss Dolly, who greeted him with the most encouraging of smiles. He complimented her on the bewitching gown which made her prettier than ever, wondered where she had been all this time, shook hands effusively — and passed on. Miss Dolly bit her lip and took hasty survey of the room. The old reliables were all actively engaged, spinning about the room with other partners.

"Oh, I adore this tune," she said suddenly. "Come on, let 's waltz."

Then, just to show her independence, she suggested that the next dance, a polka, was a dreadful bore and Skippy, still unsuspicious, bore her away in great delight to the shadowy intimacies of the veranda. Miss Dolly was a little quicker in her perceptions. She saw what was up, and being of high spirit, decided to answer in kind. She returned to the floor and danced a third time with Skippy, who was too fatuously pleased with his good fortune to notice the suppressed hilarity in the room.

"Let 's sit here," said Dolly, selecting the most public spot. When Happy Mather and Crocker and Lazelle and the superior Mr. Hicks did arrive, she would have her revenge. She would refuse flatly. She would dance with Skippy openly and defiantly the whole evening. The only drawback was that no one came.

They sat out two dances and then a feeling of panic descended upon them. They were horribly, glaringly conspicuous. Every eye was on them. Every one was whispering at their expense. Dolly had never known the sensation of being a wallflower, and for the first time her natural wit deserted her. At first she had deployed all the instinctive arts of her challenged coquetry. She had openly flaunted her affection for Skippy, smiling into his fascinated eyes, laughing uproariously at the in-

anities he had to offer. Then her spirits suddenly evaporated and she listened with a cold creepy feeling in her back, while Skippy, in desperation for a topic of conversation, began to explain the intricacies of Mosquito-Proof Socks, to perfecting which his life henceforth would be devoted.

"Let 's dance."

Skippy, halfway in his exposition of the commercial value of an invention which would appeal to twice ninety million legs at six pair of socks a year, flushed and rose heavily. The light had dawned upon him at last. They were being put in coventry and the diabolical mind that was thus taking its fiendish revenge could be none other than the man he had wronged — Hickey Hicks.

From now on it was torture, pure, unadulterated, exquisite torture, such as only the self-conscious stripling of the first sixteen awkward years can experience. To save his life he could not think of a thing to say, while in his arms Dolly grew heavier and heavier. His arm ached, his feet began to stumble, he bumped into other couples.

After he had sat out the eighth dance in fitful silence, he began to experience the strangest antipathy for Miss Dolly Travers, who but an hour before had been the rapturous ending of all his day dreams. Let no cynic here exclaim, with facile wit, that romance ends

thus in the compulsory quality of marriage. We make no such allusions. We only state that Skippy, in his inexperience, began morally to disintegrate. The more he was forced to sit, chained by convention, the object of public hilarity, the more he wondered at his former infatuation. Dolly disputed by every male was a figment of the imagination — how different was the reality! Mimi Lafontaine was a hundred times more desirable and at least had *something* to say! The situation was hideous, but how escape? If only he could get to Hickey and buy him off! But he could n't get to his tormentor, that was the trouble! Then suddenly an idea came to him. In his pocket was the roll of bills that comprised the sinking fund for his dress suit. Carefully and unnoticed by Dolly, he extracted a two dollar bill. When next he danced, he danced with the bill openly flaunted behind the all-unconscious Dolly, openly offering it to whoever would come to his rescue. Still the banded traitors smirked and remained loyal to their leader — they, too, had scores to settle!

"Get me a glass of lemonade, won't you, Jack, like a dear?" said Dolly, who had thought of a possible opening.

Skippy went and took a full five minutes until he had made quite sure the next dance was under way. To his horror Dolly was where he had left her — sitting alone.

When the tenth dance had begun, he hesitated no longer. He replaced the two dollar bill by one of the next denomination, and with the V carefully exposed, he managed to bump into Hickey and draw his attention to the price of his liberty. Hickey appeared interested but only half convinced. Skippy held out another dance and then, groaning inwardly, increased the bait to ten.

Whereupon Hickey condescended. The signal was given and Skippy, standing aloof and humble in the shadows of the veranda, perceived through the window Miss Dolly Travers, as the stags swarmed down, resume her sway as the queen of the ball.

On Monday Hickey departed in a burst of glory. With him something else departed—a great romance. Illusions are fragile things and when they are shattered the pieces are too small to be reassembled. *Sic transit* Dolly Travers!

CHAPTER XXIX

Dead Game Sports

AT the end of August, Mr. Skippy Bedelle met Mr. Snorky Green on the Fall River Boat, each being in complete agreement as to the economic superiority of the water route to the great metropolis, when the end in view was the acquisition of that radiant apotheosis of perfect manhood, the first dress suit.

"Gee Whilikins, Skippy, you 're enormous," said Snorky, measuring him with his eye. "How did you do it? I 've only gained half an inch."

"I 'm twelve pounds heavier," said Skippy proudly. "Feel that."

"Hard as nails!" said Snorky, pinching the proffered biceps. "You do look different, too."

Skippy, thinking on Dolly Travers, blushed.

"Got to shave every other day now," he said hastily, to cover his confusion.

"Have a coffin nail?" said Snorky, feeling that a bold stroke was necessary to restore the balance.

"Dyin' for one," said Skippy, who disliked the practice cordially. He selected a cigarette, tapped it on his hand and rolled the rim on the tip of his tongue. "Not bad."

"Nice bouquet, eh?" said Snorky, who had listened in.

"What? You betcha! What 's the monogram?"

"Uncle Ben. I swiped them," said Snorky, who was returning from a family visit. "Suppose we give the old tub the once over and see if there 's anything worth looking at on board."

Skippy allowed the cigarette to hang pendant from his lower lip, tilted his Panama with the purple and white band, sank his hands in his pockets and imitated carefully the dead game sporting slouch of his companion as they proceeded on their critical inspection of the feminine offering on the decks.

"Rum bunch," said Snorky, who was putting it on for Skippy. "Little girl over there got nice eyes."

"Piano legs."

"What?"

"Piano legs. Big as a porpoise in five years," said Skippy, putting it on for Snorky.

"I daresay," said Snorky, who continued his efforts to impress his chum by staring down a large buxom lady who happened to glance their way. "Rather good-looking, the old fighting brunette over there."

"Seemed interested in you."

"Yes, rather," said Snorky, turning for a fatuous backward glance.

"What 's this?" said Skippy, suddenly interested.

Ahead by the rail two young girls were watching curiously the vanishing outlines of the harbor.

"That 's class," said Snorky instantly.

"You betcha!" said Skippy, noting the large leghorn hats dripping with rosebuds, the trim ruffled organdie dresses and the twin parasols, pink and mauve. The young ladies looked up curiously at their swaggering approach and then away. Skippy in his assiduous pursuit of fiction of the romantic tinge had often read of "velvety" eyes and pondered incredulously. For the first time in his life, suddenly, in the hazards of a crowded steamer, a young girl of irreproachable manners had looked at him and the eyes were undeniably "velvety." It troubled him. Not that he was susceptible to such a point, but it stirred memories of ancient readings into the night on soft window seats, or under green trees in the troubling warmth of spring days.

"The blonde for mine," said Snorky pompously.

"I did n't see her," said Skippy dreamily.

They linked arms and passed in the rakish, indolent manner of thorough men of the world who know that but to be seen is to conquer. To their discomfiture the young ladies failed to notice the extreme distinction of their manly

appearance and shortly afterward left the deck.

"We failed to impress," said Skippy disconsolately.

"A lot you know about women."

"They never saw us."

"Huh! Betcha they were sneaking looks at us every time we passed. Just you wait. They 'll be out in a jiffy."

"What 'll we do?"

"Pretend we 're not interested."

They stalked the deck ten times with a nonchalant, bored air, but slightly roving eyes.

"They 're waiting inside," said Snorky obstinately.

"Well, you go and scout. I 'll wait here," said Skippy, whose interest was only a determination not to be outshone by his chum of chums.

In ten minutes Snorky was back, all excitement.

"Just as I told you. They 're in the front saloon playing cards. Come on."

"What are you going to do?" said Skippy, hesitating.

Snorky thought a moment.

"We 've got to put over something big."

"Well, what?"

Snorky thought again.

"We must make 'em think we 're high rollers; — yachts, race horses, and all that."

"Well, how?"

Snorky thought a third time.

"How much money have you got?" said Skippy suddenly.

"In cash?"

"Sure. On you."

"About forty-three dollars," said Snorky, who from time to time had been feeling with his fingers to assure himself that no pickpocket had outwitted him.

"Fork it out. I 've got an idea."

"Is it all right?" said Snorky, who had reason to dread the Skippy imagination.

"Fine and dandy. Don't worry. Trust me. Show 'em up."

Snorky produced a twenty, two tens and three common-a-garden ones.

"You keep a twenty and you stick it on top. Then you change the two tens into ones and that makes some whopping wad, doesn't it?"

"Say, I don't get—"

"Leave it to me," said Skippy, who led the way to the cigar counter.

Ten minutes later Mr. Skippy Bedelle and Mr. Snorky Green, with large banded cigars, entered the ladies' saloon and carelessly installed themselves at a table next but one to that occupied by the young girls.

"Well, old sport," said Snorky, twirling the mercifully unsmoked cigar in his fingers. "Suppose we go over our accounts?"

"Always be businesslike," said Skippy, pois-

ing a pencil over a sheet of paper with plutocratic nonchalance.

"Owe you thirty-five plunks for last night's poker game," said Snorky, raising his voice sufficiently.

"That 's right, and I owe—"

"Hold on, me first."

Snorky dug into his trousers and came up with a roll of greenbacks that made the colored porter who happened to be passing stumble in his step.

"Twenty and ten and five, makes thirty-five," he said, peeling them off with a nimble exhibition of legerdemain which kept the lower bills well concealed.

"Keerect," said Skippy, sweeping them towards him with a languidly indifferent air.

"Then I borrowed a ten spot to tip the head waiter. Remember?"

"I do remember."

"Five and five. Correct?"

"Keerect."

"How do we stand on the ponies?"

"Only fair," said Skippy. "We lost two and won one. I could n't get our money up on the others."

"Let 's see. It was twenty-five bones each, was n't it?" said Snorky, jogging his elbow, to notify him that the impression they were making was simply stupendous.

"Right again."

"That sets me back fifty plunks. That 's easy. Here you are, one, two, three, four, five tens. Correct?"

"Keerect," said Skippy, brushing in the greenbacks, with the same casual motion of his hand.

"That squares me."

"It does."

"Now what 's coming back?"

Skippy in turn, after certain struggles with his trousers pocket, brought forth a bundle which could have done credit to a cattle king and said, as he slipped the elastic,

"Twenty-five at five to one is just about one hundred and twenty-five."

"That 's all right, but how about the tip to Spike Murphy?"

"Spike Murphy?" said Skippy, looking at him hard.

"The fellow who put us wise."

"Oh, that 's all right," said Skippy, recovering a proper sporting manner. "Forget that. I cleaned up enough to handle a little thing like that."

"Lucky dog!"

"One hundred and twenty-five," said Skippy, going through the proper motions. "Twenty once, twice, three times, four and five. One hundred, and ten and twenty and twenty—"

But at this moment, whether by chance, by intent or by the emotion caused by the display

of such wealth, there was a crash from the nearby table and two magazines fell to the floor. Snorky, ever alert, sprang to his feet, retrieved the magazines and offered them to the blondest of the two with punctilious courtesy.

"Allow me. I believe these belong to you?"

"Oh thank you," said the young lady, looking quite distressed.

"Awfully warm night, is n't it?" said Snorky, whose heart was pumping at his own unexampled audacity.

"Sir, I do not think I have been introduced to you," said the young lady, stiffening and looking what to Snorky, at least, were daggers.

He uttered several unintelligible sounds, flushed a fiery red and backed away.

"Right where the chicken met the axe," said Skippy, who began to whistle a melancholy tune as he gathered up the scattered greenbacks. "Here comes mother."

"Let 's beat it," said Snorky, who felt a sudden need for a purer atmosphere.

"You know women better than I do," said Skippy, who though a chum was human.

"Damn them all," said Snorky, peering over the railing into the night and exposing his forehead to the cooling breeze. "But why the devil did she lead me on?"

CHAPTER XXX

Experiments in a Dress Suit

WHEN they descended at the Southampton station the family coach was in waiting. They surrendered their valises to the footman while each clung tightly to a large square paper box, carefully protected and corded.

"Gee, it 'll just about knock the wind out of old Caroline," said Snorky in a whisper.

"Don't they suspect?" said Skippy nervously.

"Not for a minute. Say, I 'd never have the nerve to sport it alone."

"Have you got the box with the shirt studs in?" said Skippy fidgeting.

"Why I handed it—"

"That 's so. They 're here," said Skippy, after a dip into four pockets.

At the thought that at last after sixteen long and eventful years the supreme moment had come when he would step out of the shell of adolescence and greet the waiting world in his first forty-dollar, customs-made dress suit, in high collar, white stiff bosom, two tails pendant, Skippy shivered slightly and drew a deep, delightfully terrified breath.

"We 'll put it over all right," he said loudly, and he began to whistle as is the instinct of boyhood, whether facing the possibility of a

parental caning; screwing up courage to ring her doorbell; or turning a gloomy corner in the moonlight where something horrid and shapeless may be lurking.

Twenty minutes later, as he was solicitously examining the crease in the soft lovely black trousers, after hanging the swallow-tailed coat over a padded hanger, Snorky came in with a face of thunder.

"Well, what *do* you think?" he said nervously.

"They forgot to put in the pants," said Skippy, leaping to the worst.

"Shucks, no. There 's a party on to-night."

"A party?"

"There 'll be millions of people to dinner and a dance after."

"What of it?" said Skippy loudly, though the chill began to ascend from his feet.

"My Lord—"

"Say, you 're not losing your nerve, you chicken-hearted rabbit, are you?" said Skippy, who was now absolutely terrified.

"You mean you 're game?"

"Snorky! I would n't have believed it of you!"

"Say, it is n't your family or your sister," said Snorky angrily. "My aunt's cat's pants, how they 'll howl!"

Skippy prepared for the great event by what would have sufficed for a European semi-annual immersion and, emerging spotless and stain-

less from the bath, with his derby closely pressed over the niceties of his parted hair, perceived that he had still forty-two minutes left of the hour and a half he had allotted to this supreme toilette.

"My Lord, I hope I 've got everything," he said, standing in diaphanous contemplation. The one thing that worried him a little was the studs. They had looked over twenty different varieties, flat ones and solid gold ones, spirals, encrusted studs, and studs that anchored with a queer twist. Finally they had allowed themselves to be persuaded by a flashy clerk and settled on a patent imitation pearl stud that pushed in and stuck, simplest thing in the world, like the click of a spring lock; that would leave the beautiful creamy white expanse of shirt absolutely unruffled by any preliminary struggle.

"Shall I try 'em on first?" he thought, glancing down at the immaculate bosom. But at this moment a voice behind him cried pompously.

"Old top. Cast your eye on this."

Skippy gazed and his courage rose. His private opinion was that Snorky looked like a French butcher going to a morning wedding in hired regalia.

"The suit's a lalapazooza!" he said carefully.

"It 'll kill old Carrots," said Snorky, who thus referred to his sister. "She 's over the age limit now but when I pull this she 'll look

a grandmother! Say, look me over. Make sure there are no tags or price marks. All right?''

''Jim dandy.''

He went two steps to the door and turned.

''Say, remember one thing. Keep your fists out of your trousers pockets, Bo. That 's important.''

''Why so?''

''Ignoramus,'' said Skippy, reproachfully. That 'll give the whole game away. You never stick your hands in your trousers pockets unless you 're a greenhorn.''

''How do the shirt studs work?'' said Skippy, nervously.

''Simplest things in the world.''

''Say, Snorky?''

''Well?''

''These coat tails have got pockets in them.''

''Sure they have, you chump! They 're to hide your mawlers in.''

''Don't be so bright,'' said Skippy indignantly. ''But what *do* we put into them, then?''

''Handkerchief.''

''Rats. I know better than that. You stick a handkerchief up in front and pull out just the tip of it.''

''Perhaps it 's for a toothbrush if you 're staying over night.''

''No, but honest, what do you put in them?'' said Skippy, who did not wish to miss a trick.

They thought this over a long moment, and

then gave it up as greater intelligences, pondering on the mysteries of existence, have given it up.

"Well, ta-ta. See you below."

"Where you goin'?"

"I 'm going to break in the family one by one," said Snorky, wagging his head. "Lettin' 'em get over the shock. I 'm taking no chances."

Left to himself, Skippy hastened to his own preparations. At the risk of being acclaimed a traitor to the sex, we must record here the truth, that with five mirrors surrounding him and one in the bathroom, it took Skippy exactly forty-five minutes to perfect his toilette from every angle of observation. First he burrowed into his shirt which deranged the part in his hair and necessitated another period of readjustment. Then he put on his trousers and adjusted the suspenders until each trouser leg hung with the crease untroubled and just clear of the boot. But having done this he discovered, as others have discovered, that patent shirt-studs sported in an unaccustomed place, require the fullest play of the arms. The placing of the studs was of itself the most delicate of operations and twice he went down on his knees and halfway under the bed to retrieve the upper one which popped out just as he thought he had it securely imprisoned. Once more he adjusted the suspenders, and began

work on the stiff collar which caught his throat and forced up his chin. After five minutes' struggle he succeeded in fastening this with the aid of a buttonhook, and suddenly the thing he had feared was upon him. He had forgotten, completely forgotten, the white tie!

What was he to do? Snorky was beyond the reach of assistance. Twice he had heard shouts of uproarious delight down the hall marking his chum's progress in breaking in the family. The house was huge and Snorky by this time was down on the second floor or even practicing in the parlor. He went through the motions of searching through his valise but he knew all the while that it was futile. He had forgotten the final touch, the *sine qua non* of fashion!

He found a wrapper in the hall closet and opening the door cautiously peered into the hall. An uncle and an older brother of Snorky's were on the same floor, but he had not been introduced and his courage failed him. He returned to his room and contemplated the white bed spread, the pillow slips and the muslin curtains in a wild hope that something might lend itself to an improvisation. Then he shook his head mournfully. There was only one way out. To appear properly dressed in this, a strange house, before strangers, he would have to commit a crime! The only way to get a white tie was to steal one. At this moment while his whole moral future turned on

an impulse, a door down the hall opened and Skippy, peering forth, beheld an elderly gentleman, immaculately dressed, descend the stairs. For a short moment he hesitated but atavism and necessity were against him. He stole out into the hall and made his way on tiptoe. All at once he heard a step ascending the stairs. A bathroom door was open. He sprang into it with a thumping heart and waited breathlessly, leaning limply against the wall. All at once his eye fell on the clothes basket. From the top a crumpled white tie was hanging. He was saved!

He seized the tie and head erect, honor intact, walked fearlessly back to his room. But there, a new dilemma! The tie was indeed of whitest lawn but, alas! across one end was a smudge which defied the most persistent rubbing. Skippy, as has been observed, was at the period when the imagination is not confined by tradition. In desperation he resorted to the washbasin and with the aid of a brush, triumphantly banished the damned spot. Then having wrung the limp mass, he spread the tie carefully against the window pane and covering it with a handkerchief, laboriously ironed it out with a shoe.

Just as the clock struck half past seven, Mr. John C. Bedelle descended the last stairs and greeted a critical world. Beads of perspiration stood on his forehead, his spine seemed made of

rubber, his knees shook and his restless, chilly hands loomed before him, homeless and lost; but he was safe at last in all the intricacies of a dress suit — a man of fashion among men of the world!

Snorky was standing miserably by the fireplace, his large peppermint ears flanking a heated face, as he defiantly faced the family hilarity. Then Skippy's superb aplomb failed him. Just beyond the smirking family, among the early guests, was Miss Jennie Tupper, the girl with the velvety eyes, and at her side, as icily correct as when the night before she had crushed Snorky's floundering attempt at lady-killing, her sister Margarita.

CHAPTER XXXI

Shirt Studs as Cupid's Messenger

AFTER the room had returned to place Skippy rallied, took the introductions with preternatural stiffness, and gravitated to Snorky. The white shirt front in the most unaccountable manner had swollen to alarming dimensions, the coat tails must be dragging on the floor. His collar cut under his imprisoned neck and his large white hands, longing for sheltering pockets, seemed to float before him like inflated balloons. If his were complete manhood, — oh for a soft shirt and a turned down collar!

"Kill it," said Snorky under his breath.

"What 's wrong?"

"Kill that flag of liberty, you chump!" said Snorky, glowering at the flaming edge of the silk bandana handkerchief which Skippy was sporting at his breast pocket.

"What's wrong with that? Every one does it."

"Wrong? Look around you."

Skippy did so and surreptitiously extinguished the bandana.

"Holy Mike, we 're in for it," said Snorky. "Do you know who they are?"

"The girls?"

"Daughters of the Presbyterian minister, strict as nails — Sunday school and mission stuff. Oh Lord!"

"Pretend you knew it all along."

"And that other stuff? The dead game sporting life?"

"Stick to your guns!" said Skippy desperately.

The next moment he was at table, between Miss Caroline Bedelle and the blonde Margarita, while across the table the soft velvety eyes of Jennie looked at him sadly and reproachfully.

"Good gracious, Jack," said Snorky's sister, staring at him. "I never, never would have known you. You 've gained twenty pounds."

"It 's the shirt," thought Skippy, glancing down at the bulging front that gave him the torso of a wrestler. Then he began to wonder which was the owner of the still slightly moist tie. But soon all discomforts, even the intricate maze of forks and knives, were forgotten before the alarming problem of the shirt front. When he sat upright, stiff as a ramrod, it was relatively quiescent, but the moment he relaxed or bent forward to eat it bulged forth as though working on a spring, until a lurking horror that it would escape altogether began to possess him. He crept forward on his chair and balanced on the edge, trying to mitigate the conspicuous rigidity of his pose by a nonchalant coquetting with the salt celler.

"I suppose I must talk to you, for appearances' sake," said the blonde Miss Tupper.

"Why so?" said Skippy haughtily, for having just reacted from blondes, blondes did not appeal to him.

"You ask?"

"Certainly I ask, and I think an apology is due my friend and myself," said Skippy from his great fund of literary conversations.

"Well, I like that!"

"You cut us dead twice on the deck and then pretended not to know Arthur when he started to speak to you," said Skippy icily.

Miss Margarita Tupper looked at him with the intuitive suspicion of the righteous.

"I don't believe a word of it," she said.

"*That* is adding insult to injury," said Skippy, still in the best fictional manner. "Pardon me if I do not pursue this conversation any longer."

"I guess that 'll hold the old girl," he said, chuckling inwardly. But alas for such vanities, or was it the unseen moral guardians which may be expected to watch over the daughters of the upright? The sudden shift of his indignant body was attended with fatal results.

There was a distinct "pop." The upper patent shirt-stud shot out, tinkled against a vase and rolled directly towards the girl with the velvety eyes.

"What 's that?" said Caroline, startled.

"Some one threw a pebble against the window pane," said a voice.

"Something cracked."

They are wrong, eternally wrong, who look upon youth as a period of careless joy on the threshold of manhood's struggles and sorrows! Never in after-life would Skippy Bedelle experience such a blank, helpless horror as in that awful moment, when he sat overcome with shame and confusion, awaiting detection. What in heaven's name was he to say when the eyes of the whole company would inevitably be directed to the telltale stud, blazing now at the plate of Miss Tupper? What did any one say, anyhow, when a shirt stud popped across the table? Nothing in his experience or the experience of all the novelists in the world could supply a clue. Wave after wave of red and redder confusion rippled up from his collar and surged to the roots of his hair. Should he brazen it out? Should he make a light answer, or was it etiquette to apologize humbly to his hostess? How could he tell? If he were discovered there was only one thing to do, to run for it, to retreat to his room, lock his door, escape by the window and leave by the night train, disgraced and branded forever!

"Very funny," said Mrs. Bedelle. "Caroline, look at the Bohemian glass vase. I 'm sure I heard it crack."

All glances immediately concentrated on the

fatal area. Detection was now but a question of instants. Then Skippy in the throes of despair saw the plump little hand of Miss Jennie Tupper reach out and casually close over the offending pearl stud. He was saved, saved by the miracle of compassion and forgiveness that lifts women to those sublime heights where mere men cannot attain!

Tears threatened his eyes, his throat swelled up and slowly subsided. He looked over into the velvety eyes and sent a message of abject gratitude. He was her slave from now on, irrevocably bound, faithful until death!

"You didn't detherve it," said Miss Jennie an hour later when in the seclusion of the veranda she had restored to him the unspeakable stud.

"You 're an angel," said Skippy hoarsely. "I 'll never, never forget that. That was white of you, awfully white!"

"You didn't detherve it," repeated Miss Tupper with as much severity as can accompany the slightest of lisps and the eyes of a gazelle.

"Don't be hard on a fellow," said Skippy miserably.

"It was outwageous. You know, you didn't know us."

How was he to lie to his saviour and benefactor and yet how betray a chum?

"It did look bad," he said, momentarily at loss, "but honest, now, Snorky's intentions were nothing but honorable. Honest they were."

"I with I could believe it," said Miss Jennie sadly.

"I say, you must think I 'm an awful rum sort," said Skippy, on whom the velvety eyes against the distant moon ripple on the water and the nearby night fragrance of the honeysuckle was beginning to work its charm. "Well, I suppose I am—"

"Oh no."

"A rotten good-for-nothing lot," said Skippy gloomily, falling easily into the new part and surprised to find what peculiar pleasure could be extracted from the rôle of the wayward.

"No, no, you 're not that bad," said Miss Jennie earnestly, "but I do think—well you 've not been under the withest of influenthes, have you?"

"I haven't had a chance," said Skippy desperately. "Everything has been against me. Guess no one cares what becomes of me."

"I know," said the gentle voice. "It ith hard."

"Look here, Miss Tupper," said Skippy, beginning to be convinced of his own predestination for the gallows, as he instinctively felt the sentimental value of the rôle. "Men like myself don't get a chance to know women like you.

I wish to heaven—'' He stopped, a lump in his throat, and gazed into the sentimental night. Great heavens, what a depraved character he really was! For the first time he saw himself in the enormity of his sinning. It was not only the cigarettes and the one black cigar, purloined from his father, but the orgies at penny-ante, the occasional game of craps back of Mather's barn. Then he remembered other damning episodes in his black record—the time he had gone into a mathematics exam and read the formulas from Buster Bean's collar; the night he had helped Sport McGinnis smuggle a bottle of beer in for a welsh rabbit and swallowed a full third of the rank stuff. Then there was an appalling record of evasions, turnings and twistings of the exact and literal truth—

''You can't be altogether bad if you 're so honeth,'' said Miss Jennie, in whom the instinct was lively to bring the sinner home.

''I am. I am,'' said Skippy lugubriously.

''Can't I help—juth a little?''

''Would you, would you really?'' he said eagerly.

''Let me—pleath.''

The plump little fingers came forth and met the rough hand of the sinner. Skippy squeezed them convulsively, not daring to trust his voice, nodded twice and smiled bravely back in the moonlight to show that the leaven of higher things was already beginning to work.

"How 'd you get on with Margarita?" he asked Snorky when they retired for the night.

"Margarita 's a pippin!" said Snorky.

"I squared you all right."

"You bet you did! She came right up and fed out of my hand. But, say, they swallowed it all right."

"What?"

"The dead game sporting life stuff."

"Yes, I know. Got a cig?"

"What? Oh yes. Get you one in a jiffy. But say. Go easy. The governor and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Nerves sort of jumpy to-night," said Skippy languidly. "Need a few whiffs to quiet 'em down."

It was something new in his life, a good influence. All his better nature rose up in response. So summoning up his courage, he lit a cigarette and tried to inhale — a desperate character, worthy to be saved, certainly ought to inhale! It was nauseating. It stung his lungs and set his head to reeling. He left the window and crawled over to the bed where he lay weak but unconquered.

"By jinks, I will inhale, I 'll inhale to-morrow!" he said, seeing always the uplifting smile and the pure velvety eyes of Miss Jennie as the room waltzed around him. "It 's going to be awfully hard living up to her, but I 'll do it if it kills me!"

CHAPTER XXXII

Living up to an Angel

SKIPPY woke with a blood curdling shriek and landed sprawling in the middle of the floor, his legs caught in the sheets, his head smothered in the comforter, a convulsive grip on the bolster, which he was desperately trying to stifle when Snorky flung himself out of bed and rushed to the rescue.

"Hold him back. Help Snorky! Hold him!"

"Hold what, who?" said Snorky, pursuing the smothered figure of Skippy, who was still wrestling with the bolster. "Wake up. It 's me! It 's Snorky."

Skippy's grip relaxed and presently his terror-stricken eyes emerged from the comforter.

"Holy Maria! In another minute he 'd have had me in the electric chair," he said, wiping the clammy perspiration from his forehead.

"Nightmare eh?"

"Ugh! Gee! Moses!"

"Too much cigarette."

"Golly, what a life I 've been leading!" said Skippy, referring to the dream. " Bar rooms and gambling dens, dark lanterns, hold-ups. racetracks and —"

"Wake up, wake up!"

"It 's all in the dream," said Skippy sulkily. Then he remembered that all through the hideous phantasmagoria, in the smoky mists of low gambling dens, in the drizzle of midnight conclaves, across the sepulchral silences of leaden prisons, there had flitted the beatific vision of an angel with velvety eyes and the softest of lisps.

"Well, go on," said Snorky.

"Can 't remember any more," said Skippy. Her name must be shielded at every cost.

He had determined to be a lost character, a wayward son, a gentleman sport, with nerves of steel. The sentimental values appealed to his imagination. It gave a deep romantic tinge to the too matter-of-fact freckled nose and hungry mouth. Besides the end was noble and the end was Miss Jennie Tupper.

The new rôle of course had certain exigencies. To be an interesting reprobate and engage Miss Jenny Tupper's sentimental proclivities for redemption, it was necessary to present some concrete evidence of a sinful life. He was shockingly deficient in all the habits that lead to the gallows. Desperate characters he remembered (recalling the Doctor's terrific sermons on the Demon Cigarettes which are the nails in the coffins of mothers) usually had their fingers stained with telltale traces of the nicotine which was gnawing at their lungs.

He ensconced himself by the fireplace (out of

deference to Snorky's estimate of the governor) and taking care not to inhale, smoked a cigarette to the end. But the result was unsatisfactory. He burned his fingers over the distasteful performance but acquired nothing in the way of a stain. He smoked a second and a third and then seized by an inspiration carefully rubbed in the moist ends.

When they walked back from the beach that morning Miss Jennie Tupper lost no time in opening up the fascinating subject of the sinful one's reclamation. Skippy had just brought forth a cigarette, tapped it professionally on his wrist and said:

"Don't mind, do you?"

"I do mind," said Miss Tupper severely. "Juth look at your hand. It ith thaking."

Skippy extended a palsied hand with the second and third fingers yellowed like a Chinaman's.

"It 's worse this morning," he said carelessly with the sigh of one who contemplates stoically the approaching end.

"It 's tewible, tewible to let a habit make a slave of you like that! At your age too! How did it ever get such a dweadful hold on you?"

"I began as a boy," said Skippy slowly, for he had still to work out the story. "You know how it is. Fast company, money in your pockets, no one caring. That 's it, that 's how it was."

He raised the cigarette to his lips.

"Don't smoke it, pleath."

"Just one, just half a one," said Skippy with a haunted look. "My Lord, it 's been an hour —"

"Pleath for my thake, Jack."

He hesitated, swallowed hard, made one or two false gestures, and flung away the cigarette.

"If you ask it like that," he said huskily.

"I 'm going to athk more," said Miss Tupper with shining eyes. "I 'm going to athk you to pwomith never to touch another thigawette or another card."

"I can't," said Skippy. "It 's gone too far, it 's beyond me."

"But it 'll kill you, Jack," said Miss Tupper, alarm in the beautiful eyes.

"I could n't promise. I could n't keep it," said Skippy, who had no intention of relinquishing his dramatic advantage, "but I 'll make a fight for it. If you want me to — Jennie. If you really care?"

The moon ripple and the fragrance of the honeysuckle were no longer about them. Miss Tupper in the calmer light of the day considered her words with due regard to precept and standard.

"I 'll be vewy glad, indeed, to help you if I can," she said properly. "We should alwayth help ath much ath we can, should n't we?"

"How coldly you say it!" said Skippy indignantly.

"But Jack," said Miss Tupper, alarmed at the tragic look on his face. "Juth think how little I know you."

"You 're quite right," said Skippy with magnificent generosity. "I don't deserve more and I had no right to say that. Well it was white of you even to care this much." He took off his hat and extended his hand.

"What are you doing?"

"The only square thing by you," said Skippy with a perfect Bret Harte manner. "It 's been bully to know you and I 'll never forget about that stud. Goodbye."

"Do you want to make me vewy vewy unhappy?" said Miss Jennie with a reproachful look in the velvety eyes. Skippy returned the hat at once to his head.

"I 'll do anything, anything for you," he said huskily.

Now there are two stages in the process of returning the wandering sheep to the fold and not the least interesting is the period of investigation. Miss Tupper had worked in missions with enthusiasm but there was something in the present case which staggered her imagination. How could a boy of sixteen, brought up with all the advantages of a home and good influences, have sunk so deeply into the mire of evil? How could one be so depraved and yet

look at you with such an open, winning smile? Was he inherently bad or just weak, just reaching out blindly for some good influence to set him right?

"If I can help you," she said, leading the way to a little summer house on the parsonage and shuddering as she glanced down at the nicotine stained fingers, "and I do want to help you — I 'm several years older than you are — you muth tell me evewything."

"I will, I want to," said Skippy, summoning up all the powers of his imagination.

"You know," said Miss Tupper, a little embarrassed, "I heard, I could n't help hearing all you thaid that night on the boat."

"You did. . . . Good heavens!"

"Perhaps you don't want to tell me."

"I might as well make a clean breast of it," said Skippy, wondering where the exigencies of the situation would lead him.

"I 'm afwaid Jack," said Miss Tupper sympathetically, "that your fwiend Arthur Gween ith not a vewy good influenth for you."

"Snorky?" said Skippy momentarily surprised.

"He theems to have vewy low athothiations," said Miss Tupper earnestly.

"You mean racing and jockeys and all that sort of stuff?" said Skippy, willing to follow the line of least resistance for a while. "Oh, Arthur is n't half bad."

"I don't think you thee him ath he weally ith," said Miss Tupper firmly. "No I don't think he ith at all the pwoper perthon for you to be with."

"Could n't I help him?" said Skippy craftily. "We should always try to help, should n't we?"

"You would have to be vewy vewy stwong for that, would n't you?"

"Yes, of course," said Skippy, with his mind on the delicate arch of Miss Tupper's little foot.

Miss Tupper, who was expectantly set for an interesting confession, was somewhat disappointed at the lengthy delay.

"I 'm afwaid your pawenth gave you too much money," she said finally. "It ith tho often that, ith n't it?"

There were some things that were too much even for Skippy's imagination. In the present case it absolutely refused to follow such a lead.

"No, it was n't that," he said slowly. After all it is only the first one hundred thousand lies that are difficult. Skippy's hesitation was brief. He remembered the episode of the fictitious Tina Tanner that had so often served him in delicate moments.

"I almost made a wreck of my life," he began, frowning terrifically.

"Tell me," said Miss Tupper eagerly.

"She was n't a bad sort; only, — well stage life is different."

"Stage life! You mean —"

"She was an actress," said Skippy nodding.

"But how—"

"I ran away from home. They never understood me. Family fight. Swore I 'd never set foot in the old house again. Cut for the West. You get to see a rough side of life like that you know, mining camps, mule drivers, lumber men. Good sorts," he added reflectively, "but wild, very wild. You could n't understand."

"But your father and mother?" said Miss Tupper, wide-eyed and thoroughly thrilled.

"I 'd rather not say anything against them," said Skippy magnanimously.

"Poor boy!"

"I 've kept pretty straight considering," said Skippy, who did not wish to paint the picture too black.

"And the girl?" said Miss Tupper, who could not restrain a perfectly feminine curiosity.

"Tina? She wanted me to go on the stage with her," said Skippy, who had now told the story a sufficient number of times to begin to believe in it. "It was touch and go. Well, I did n't. That 's all."

"What a dweadful thide of life you 've theen," said Miss Tupper, appalled. "At your age, too!"

"I say, I never expected to tell any one this."

"But are n't you glad you did? Don't you

feel better now that you 've told the twuth!'' said Miss Tupper enthusiastically.

Skippy thought this over and acknowledged finally that confession was a relief.

''Now pwomise never, never to gamble, smoke, or dwink. Pwomise, Jack. You don't know how much better you'll feel.''

''I 'm not strong on signing pledges and that sort of thing,'' said Skippy cautiously.

''Oh no, juth pwomise.''

''For how long?''

''Until you 're twenty-one.''

''I think it 's better to promise what you 're sure you can carry out, don't you? It has a better effect,'' said Skippy craftily. ''Tell you what I 'll do. I 'll make a promise for a year. Only there 's one thing.''

''What 's that?''

''I 'll promise to try and cut out the smoking, but it will have to be little by little.''

''Jack!''

''My nerves won't stand it,'' said Skippy, bringing forth the nicotine-splotched hand. ''I 'll do my best. I will, I 'll do it for you. I 'll cut down to a box a day.''

''A box?''

''Ten cigarettes, only ten, but I must have ten,'' said Skippy hungrily. ''But Jennie, you 'll have to help a lot.''

''You 'll pwomise then?''

''I pwomise,'' said Skippy, falling into the lisp.

He extended his hand and profiting by the solemnity of the moment held it with the softest and gentlest of thrills, while he said slowly:

"Ten cigarettes a day. No more. That 's my solemn promise."

"But the gambling?" said Miss Jennie, disengaging her hand.

"That's another promise," said Skippy, taking her hand again. "I promise for the space of one year, never to sit in a game of poker for money, never to shoot craps with Tacks Brooker or Happy Mather. . . ."

"Ith thith nethethawy?" said Miss Tupper blushing and seeking to free her hand from the not too painful embrace.

"I want to be sure of everything," said Skippy retaining tight hold. "Never to frequent race tracks, that 's a promise too, or to bet on the ponies, or to go into pool rooms."

"That 's quite enough," said Miss Tupper, glancing nervously up towards the veranda.

"But I have n't promised to give up drinking and all that sort of thing," said Skippy enthusiastically.

Miss Tupper, in whom a slight suspicion was beginning to grow as to the exact motives back of the sudden conversion, hesitated, but finally put forth her hand a third time.

"I promise," said Skippy, drawing a deep breath and sailing away on perfumed clouds to an invisible choir. "I want to make this some-

thing terrific; it 's the most important you know. I promise for the space of one year,—so long as you care enough to answer my letters, that 's only fair you know—I promise never to touch a drop of beer or ale, or whiskey, or rum, or brandy, or sherry, or port, or . . .''

''Alcohol in any form,'' said Miss Tupper, the color of the rambler.

''In any form. So help me God,'' said Skippy slowly.

''There,'' said Miss Tupper, somewhat thrilled herself. ''And now don't you feel better, much, much better for having done it?''

And Skippy answered truthfully,

''You bet I feel better.''

Skippy, indeed, would have sworn to anything just for the look that lighted up the velvety eyes in the joy of salvation. It is doubtful if he even heard half of the program of his future existence. There was something irresistible in the softness of her eyes and the fascinating lisp. He was face to face at last with a good influence. He had met, not the type of girl that men play with lightly or madly for a month or a day, but a woman, the kind rough coarse men look up to as to a polar star, the kind of woman you think of winning after years of struggle, that keeps men straight and their thoughts on higher things, the kind of woman that pulls a drunkard out of the gutter, re-

claims him and makes a genius out of the wreck. He would be saved by her, he was bound he would — no matter what sacrifices he would have to make to keep in proper sinful condition.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Sudden Interest in the Bible

SNORKY GREEN had experienced so many shocks in his intimate contact with his chum's imagination that he had come to believe the future could hold no surprises for him. But that evening Skippy after long searching through bookcases said with a worried air:

"I say, Snorky, where do you keep the Bible?"

"The—the Bible?" said Snorky faintly.

"Sure, the Bible."

Snorky's first thought was that Skippy must be the victim of a secret malady and ready to make his will. His next was even more alarming.

"You 're not thinking of anything rash, are you, old horse?"

"What the deuce?"

"You and Jennie?"

"What the Sam Blazes are you driving at?"

"Thought you were looking up the marriage service," said Snorky facetiously.

"Shucks, no. Nothing of the sort. I just, I just want to look up a reference."

"What reference?"

"It 's of a personal nature, very personal," said Skippy.

At the end of an hour's search Snorky finally produced a Bible from the cook and watched Skippy turn through the pages in a perplexed manner.

"I 've watched that coot do some queer things," he thought, scratching his ear, "but I'll be jiggswiggered if I can figure out what he 's up to now."

At the end of half an hour Skippy looked up nonplussed.

"What do you know about the Bible, anyhow?"

"I know a lot," said Snorky astutely.

"Where do you get the ten commandments, anyhow?"

Snorky repeated the question, more and more perplexed.

"Why it 's in Genesis is n't it?"

"Naw I looked all through that."

"How about Solomon? He was wise to everything."

"Who was the guy who went up to Heaven? Perhaps he got 'em."

"Let 's ask the cook."

Which was done.

"Now what in the Sam Hill has Skippy to do with the ten commandments or the ten commandments with Skippy?" said Snorky, observing the extraordinary concentration on his

chum's face as he considered them carefully one by one. "Perhaps the heat has hit him and he 's going in for religion."

The explanation of Skippy's eccentric taste was a perfectly simple one. No sooner had he departed from the lovely presence of Miss Jennie Tupper with only the vaguest idea of what he had pledged himself not to do, but with the liveliest and most disturbing memory of the softest of hands, than he had bitterly repented the prodigal manner in which he had thrown away his opportunities.

"Why the deuce did n't I save something out," he said to himself angrily, with a sudden recollection of moonlight nights to come. "My aunt's cat's pants, but I certainly went to sleep."

From the parsonage to the Greens', from the soup to the watermelon, but one idea obsessed him: how was he to find something else to swear off? For instinct, which supplants reason in such sentimental voyages, warned him that to such a professional reformer as Miss Jennie Tupper his sole fascination lay in a lively display of original sin.

The more he thought it over the more depressed he had become. The truth was that he had outrageously neglected his opportunities and had little to offer. All he could do was to fall back on his imagination and such knowledge of the world as returned to him from an

extensive preparation in modern fiction. The trouble with his imagination was it worked too spontaneously. How much better he could have done with a little more preparation!

"Gee, I never knew a hand could give you such a fuzzy feeling," he said with a heavy sigh.

It was then that he had thought of the Bible and the ten commandments with much resulting perplexity to Snorky.

"Well, I 'll be eternally dog-switched," he said all at once. "I never would have believed it!"

"Believed what?" said Snorky, who was waiting patiently.

"Say, these are the ten commandments, are 't they?"

"Sure they are!"

"Genuine, bona-fide, patent applied for, no imitations, only original ten commandments?"

"Keerect."

"Well do you know there is n't a thing in them about cigarettes, or booze or penny-ante. Not a word!"

"Honest?"

"Read 'em yourself," said Skippy indignantly. "It 's all about being nice to your neighbor and sitting still on Sunday."

"No!"

"Fact!" said Skippy, whose real irritation was caused by the fact that the ten command-

ments did not afford him any suggestion in his new predicament.

Suddenly Snorky slapped his shoulder with a resounding whack.

"I 'm on."

"Ouch! On to what?"

"Own up! I 'm in the same box too," said Snorky with a smirk.

"You mean?"

"Sure, Margarita's trying the reform racket on me too!"

"Oh, she is?" said Skippy, who did not like sharing the honors of a stellar rôle.

"Yep, and you must have been laying it on strong for Margarita's been asking all sorts of questions about you."

"Snorky, go the limit — make it strong and stronger," said Skippy, brightening up.

"Honest?"

"The limit!"

"I get you."

Skippy took a few steps towards the door and reflected.

"When I say the limit —" he said doubtfully.

"Leave it to me."

"There are some things though."

"Don't worry — trust me."

"Well, however, I say, — don't get rash."

"Keep on trusting me," said Snorky with an airy wave of his hand.

Something in the repetition struck Skippy

where he was the weakest, in that wholesouled faith which should sanctify the friendship of a lifetime. The more he considered it the less he liked it.

"I have made a mistake," he said frowning. "Snorky has no sense of discretion."

CHAPTER XXXIV

The Way of the Transgressor

MISS JENNIE TUPPER at the end of a week acknowledged to herself with an uneasy sense of her own shortcomings that the task of keeping Mr. Skippy Bedelle in the straight and narrow path was one beyond her limited experience. It was not that she had lost confidence in her own efficiency, but that she anxiously asked herself if she could afford the time and the effort. Skippy was all for the better life and yielded at once to her suggestions. The trouble was in his staying put, as it is colloquially expressed. Each evening the cure was complete, but each morning the conversation had to begin all over. The hold that his past life had taken upon him was simply staggering and the hankering for the excitement of the gambling table or the struggle against the narcotic tyranny of the demon cigarette was such that at times she had to sit long moments holding his storm-racked and shaking hand while he fought bravely against the maddening appetite! And after a week of the closest personal attention he had only cut down the allowance of cigarettes to seven a day!

Now Miss Tupper was upright and God-fear-

ing and self-respecting, and though there was a difference of three years all in her favor, she, unlike some of her sex, scorned the use of her personal attractions, simply for the sake of a personal vanity, nor was she a collector of male scalps. She was in a moral quandary of the most metaphysical complexity. What should she do: shirk her evident moral responsibility and allow a bravely battling human soul to sink into iniquity or continue and permit a most susceptible youngster to immerse himself deeper and deeper into a hopeless passion?

Each day she came to the task of regenerating Mr. Skippy Bedelle resolved to conduct the proceedings on the grounds of the strictest formality, and each evening she admitted to herself the failure. Yet could she honestly blame herself? She gave him her female sewing-society pin to wear not as a personal token but solely as a daily reminder of the promises he had made to himself. She gave him a tie, a colored handkerchief and the sweater she had just finished for another destination. But each was given as a reward and marked a triumphant progress in his fight to acquire a final mastery over himself. When, however, Skippy brought up the question of a photograph, a crisis was reached.

"I have never never given my picture to any man," she said firmly, and the absence of sibilants made it doubly impressive. "And I never

never will. Bethideth, you know I would have to tell my mother."

They were sitting in the summer house at that romantic hour when the first day stars arrive with the mosquitoes. It was always at such moments that the craving was strongest. She had begun by holding his wrist in a strong encircling clasp but the sight of his twitching contorted fingers had been too much for her sensibilities and her hand had slipped into a more intimate clasp.

"After all he 's only a boy," she had said to herself.

"Jennie! how can you — don't you — do you realize all I 'm doing — just for you?" said Skippy, whose voice at such moments was not under control.

"No, no, you ought to do it for yourself, becauth it ith the right thing to do, becauth it will make you feel stwonger and finer."

"Nope, it 's you or nothing."

"Jack, you muth n't thay thuch thingth. I muth n't let you!"

"It is the first time I 've ever cared what became of me," said Skippy lugubriously. "You don't know what that pin means to me."

"But — "

"Do you realize what I 'm going back to? Old associations, old habits and a long, long, fight! And then there 's Snorky. I 've got to save him too."

"But Jack—"

"I 'm not asking for anything more than just your picture, nothing more,—nothing that commits you to anything! But I do want that, I must have that! I want to rise up every morning and remember and, and I want to come back every night and know that I can face your eyes," said Skippy warming up. "I say it must be a full face, not a profile, you know."

"I have n't thaid I would," said Miss Jennie in dreadful perplexity.

"But you will."

There was a long silence.

"You will, won't you?"

"I — I will think it over," said Miss Tupper finally, remembering the terrific report which her sister had brought her via Snorky Green. "I will give you my dethition after thupper."

That evening, Skippy, excusing himself from Snorky, who was taking Margarita to a lecture on the fauna and flora of Yucatan, set out for the parsonage with a thumping heart. If the truth be told he was not altogether convinced of the durability of his attraction for Miss Jennie, but he was quite certain of one thing, if there was even a sporting chance of Snorky's adding the blonde sister to his photographic gallery in the communal room in the Kennedy House, he could never confess failure! The state of his own emotion perplexed him. When he was away, he could look on with a certain

amused calm as though the whole thing were but a fascinating game. Indeed, at times he felt gorgeously, terrifically guilty, the gayest and blackest of black Lotharios. Yet no sooner had he looked into the soft velvety eyes and felt the touch of her warm fingers than he was certain, absolutely certain that his life's decision had been made, that he wanted to stand forth as a man of the strongest character, and slowly and patiently struggle upward to those heights where serenely she would wait for him.

He consumed three cigarettes — rapidly and faithfully, to make up the seven of the daily quota, mutually agreed upon; flicked the dust off his shoes with his handkerchief, tightened his belt and his tie, and, having fanned himself with his hat, found at last the courage to tread the noisy gravel and ring the bell. On his way he had built up a dozen eloquent conversations, but all memory of things tender and convincing were forgotten as he ventured over the slippery floor of the parlor and beheld at the side of Jennie a large blown-up, thin-haired male visitor in ecclesiastical black, who was introduced to him as the Rev. Percy Tuptale.

Intuition is a strange thing that fortunately returns to lovers, drunkards and children in their hour of need. From the first touch of her hand and the first look into her face Skippy knew that a crisis had arrived. Mr. Tuptale was so placidly and professionally at ease and

Miss Tupper so nervously and unsibilantly conversational that the conversation bubbled on like a kettle steaming in a distant room. He nodded once or twice, Mr. Tuptale fingered a magazine while Jennie ran on softening the s's.

"Something awful is going to happen," thought Skippy, staring at the biblical engravings on the wall. "They 're going to try to make me give back that pin."

Miss Tupper stood up. Skippy stood up. Mr. Tuptale stood up.

"Jack, I have taken a therious, a vewy therious thep," said Miss Tupper flushing. "I do want to help you tho much but, but I have thought, that ith, I am afwaid I know tho little how. You may think it dweadful of me—"

She paused and Skippy frozen to the marrow said icily,

"Yes, what is it?"

"I have gone to Mr. Tuptale—to Perthy for advithe. I, I had to."

"Excuse me," said Skippy loftily. "Is Mr. Tuptale, are you,—is he?"

"Well, yeth," said Jennie, blushing, while a smile spread enormously over Mr. Tuptale's features.

"Oh!"

"You thee that ith why," said Jennie hastily, "and, oh Jack, I do want you to talk to him, juth ath you talked to me. Tell him evwything. He ith tho helpful and tho underthanding."

She swayed from one foot to another and glanced from the boy to the man, undecided.

"Jennie, dear," said Mr. Tuptale with surgical ease, "I think ahem — suppose you let us talk this over together. It would be easier, would n't it?"

"Oh yeth, indeed!"

The next moment they were alone.

"And now my boy," said Mr. Tuptale blandly. "Come, sit down. Let 's have it out like man to man."

Skippy did not at once comply. He walked slowly around the red plush rocker and then back to the bamboo fire-screen and rested his elbows lightly upon it and glowered at the all-unconscious curate, murder in his heart.

"Jennie is very fond of you, Jack," said Mr. Tuptale, caging his fingers. "She has a warm and sympathetic nature, a big heart, and I can quite understand how deeply concerned she is in the brave fight you are making. I want you to accept me as a friend, a real friend. I know men and I know what temptations are, early associations, acquired habits. Jack, my boy, there is nothing really wrong in you. I saw that the moment you came into the room."

"Who said there was — pray?" said Skippy, whose hands were trembling with rage.

Mr. Tuptale looked up quickly, frowned and said:

"Jennie has told me all — naturally."

"She told you I gambled."

"She did."

"She told you I drank, and she told you I smoked."

"She did, of course, and I consider it was her duty to do so."

"Well is there anything wrong in that, I ask you?"

"Anything wrong in gambling, drunkenness, steeping oneself with tobacco until your hand shakes like a leaf?" said Mr. Tuptale, rising.

"Exactly. Do you know your ten commandments, sir?"

"Are you insulting me, sir?" said the curate, yielding to a perfectly natural irritation.

"Kindly point out to me in the ten commandments where any habit of mine is forbidden," said Skippy with the most impressive of declamatory attitudes.

Mr. Tuptale's jaw dropped, twice he tried to answer and twice remained inarticulate.

Skippy possessed himself of his hat and bowed in scorn.

"You will kindly restore to Miss Tupper this pin," he said, producing it after a struggle with his tie. "Also inform her that I shall immediately send back to her other articles I need not now specify. Thank you for your interest in my case but it is quite unnecessary — quite. I can stand by the ten commandments. Good night."

He went down the scrunching gravel and slammed the gate.

"And there is more, sir," he exclaimed aloud, forgetting that he was now alone. "One thing more. You can tell Miss Tupper that even among the lowest of my associates, gamblers and drunkards and race-track sharks though they be, a promise given is sacred, sacred, sir, and the man who breaks it is, is, is—"

But here rage quite overtook him and he picked up a stone and flung it at an inoffensive tree.

"It 's all Snorky!" he said in the swift progress of moods. "I knew he 'd overdo it! Holy Mike, what in Sam Hill did he tell Margarita! He must have — he —" But again imagination failed him and he proceeded on his way, fists sunk in his pockets, sliding along gloomy lanes.

"And I believed I had met a good woman!" he said bitterly. "Faugh, they 're all alike. Well, I don't care what does become of me. Serve her right if I went plump to the bad. And by jingo, I 'll do it too!"

Whereupon, having resolved upon a life of crime, he plunged his hand into his pocket and cast from him the now unnecessary cigarettes!

CHAPTER XXXV

The Scalp Hunter

SKIPPY in his sentimental progress had now reached the point where if he could not control the impulses of his sentiments he could at least review the past with some instructive profit.

"Girls are queer things, aren't they?" he said ruminatively to Snorky Green, for the mood of confidence was on him.

"Queerer and queerier," said Snorky, considering the bosom of last night's dress shirt with a view to future service.

"They get you before you know it and as soon as they get you they worry the life out of you. One way or the other they start to making you miserable just as soon as you show them you 've fallen for them. Now why?"

"Woman has no sense of gratitude," said Snorky, who had heard the phrase from a brother who had suffered.

"And you can't be friends with them — well you know, just friends."

"I know," said Snorky heavily.

"What gets me," said Skippy, "is why we fall and fall and fall."

"Habit."

"Well, perhaps."

"Sure, habit, that 's all."

"But this is the queerest of all," said Skippy, yawning and stretching his arms deliciously. "How darned fine you feel when it 's all over. You go to bed thinking the bottom 's been kicked out of things and you wake up feeling so Jim dandy rip-roarin' chuck full of happiness that you wonder what 's happened, and then you remember that you 're cured! Your time 's your own. You can wear, do and say what you like, spend your money on yourself. You 're free! Now it is queer, is n't it?"

"Like having a tooth out?" said Snorky.

"Exactly."

"Say, what story did you cook up about me to Margarita Tupper?" said Skippy, tying the white cravat for the sixth time.

"Bygones is bygones," said Snorky evasively.

"You must have had me robbin' a coach or skinning a cat," said Skippy encouragingly.

"You were throwing yourself away there, old top," said Snorky, avoiding the direct answer. "Why in another week you 'd a been reading little Rollo and taking to crocheting — a girl who lisps like that, too! Whatever was eating you, anyhow?"

"She talked like a shower bath," said Skippy unfeelingly, "but her eyes were lovely. Well, that 's over."

"What 's the use? You 'll fall again."

"Never," said Skippy firmly. Then he qualified it. "That is, not in the same way."

"There ain't no two ways."

"Sure there is. It 's like swimming. You can dive in or you can sit on the bank and splash with your toes — Savvy?"

"Ha! ha!"

"Wait and see. I know a thing or two."

Twenty minutes later, having assumed the full glories of evening dress (with studs of the good old-fashioned style that remained anchored), they departed for dinner at the Balous across the way.

"Say, put me on," said Skippy, who like all artists of the imagination was seized with an uncontrollable nervousness before facing an audience. "Who 's in the party?"

"Only Charlie and Vivi."

"Vivi?"

"Real name 's Violet but she 's dressed it up."

"What 's she like? What 's her line?"

"Stiff as a ramrod — prim as an old maid, conversation strictly educational."

"Well, what does she look like?"

"Flabby as a cart-horse."

"Say, what the devil —"

"Grub 's o.k. and there 'll be fun after," said Snorky by way of justification.

"How 's the old folks?"

"Mr. Balou? He 's a terror, gives you the

willies. If he doesn't freeze you the old girl will."

Skippy's traditional scepticism of any statement with the Snorky stamp would have warned him at any other time. But this being in a way a new experience in strange waters, his nervousness got the better of him. Halfway up the driveway he plucked Snorky's sleeve.

"Listen."

"Let go me arm you chump."

"What do you say to them?"

"Say to whom?"

"Mr. and Mrs."

"Talk about the weather, you ignoramus."

"Sure I know that, but afterwards, at dinner, what do you talk about there?"

"Don't worry, that's what girls are for."

Despite which advice, Skippy nervously ran over his conversational ammunition. There was of course Maude Adams to begin with. He tried hard to think of some book he had read — some work of sufficient dullness to serve up to this blue stocking atmosphere.

"Stop shootin' your cuff," said Snorky, applying his finger to the bell. "Don't you know anything about society?"

"Who's nervous?" said Skippy indignantly.

His backbone stiffened to the consistency of the white manacle that imprisoned his throat, he brushed the slight powder of the dust from the shining patent leathers, which in the fashion

of the day extended in long pointed toes, shot back his cuffs for the twentieth time, felt surreptitiously to assure himself that his part was functioning properly and slid behind Snorky Green as he entered the parlor.

Something that was neither prim nor stiff nor in the least resembled a cart-horse bore down on them with a swish of ruffled skirts.

"Hello, Arthur, how nice of you to come. Dad and Mumsy are out so we 're all to ourselves," said Miss Vivi Balou. "Mr. Bedelle? Oh I 've heard a lot about *you!*"

"Really now, what do you mean?" said Skippy, with a long breath of relief.

Miss Balou held his hand just an extra minute as she said this, looking up into his face with an expression of the greatest interest. She was just over five feet, of the dreaded species of brunettes, with a thin, upward pointing little nose and the brightest of eyes.

"Oh I know a terrible lot," she said, giving to her mischievous glance just the slightest, most complimentary shade of apprehension.

Mr. Skippy Bedelle grew two inches toward the ceiling and looked for a mirror.

Two strictly plain young ladies, roommates of Miss Balou's from Farmington, with large black sash bows in their hair, were introduced as Miss Barrons and Miss Cantillon.

"Elsa Barrons is perfectly wonderful with the dumb-bells, look at her forearm, and Fanny

isn't good looking but awfully clever," said Miss Balou in a whisper which was already confidential.

Brother Charles now sauntered in and shook hands with the magnificent condescension of a sophomore.

"Have a cigarette before dinner?"

He flashed a silver case and tendered it to Snorky, who being unprepared, hesitated, and took one.

"Cigarette?"

"Love to but I 'm in training," said Skippy.

Charles, having arrived at the age when everything should weigh heavily upon a sophisticated appetite, bored with his sister, bored with sister's plain looking friends and bored with sister's beaux, retired to the fireplace, where he draped himself on the mantelpiece and looked properly bored with himself, an illusion of greatness which was peculiarly impressive to tadpole imaginations.

The arduities of the opening conversation were fortunately interrupted by the announcement of dinner and Skippy, with Maude Adams in reserve, found himself at table between Miss Balou and the swinger of dumb-bells.

"You 're a Princeton man?" said Miss Barrons after several long breaths.

Skippy apportioned the compliment to his manly air and the magnificent lines of the dress suit.

"No, I 'm Yale. That is I 'm preparing," he said carelessly, and hoping that Snorky was n't listening he added: "Family did n't want me to go in too young, you know."

"Oh yes, I know," said Miss Barrons with an appreciative glance at his precocious brow. "I think that 's much better too. You don't have half as good a time if you go to college too young."

"Eighteen 's about right," said Skippy in a more mature manner.

The subject being exhausted Skippy counted up the forks while his companion, to appear at ease, asked for the salt to put in her soup.

"Do you know Jim Fisher?" she said suddenly. "He 's going to Yale next year."

Skippy did not know Jim Fisher.

"I wonder if you know a perfectly dandy girl?"

"Who 's that?"

"Alice Parks."

Skippy did not know Alice Parks, though she lived in New York City. Likewise with a growing feeling of his profound social ignorance, he successively admitted that he did not know Cornelia Baxter, Frances Bowen or Harry Fall. Whereupon Miss Barrons abandoned him to converse with Charles who did know Alice Parks who was so attractive and Harry Fall who had such a strong character.

"What the devil is there to talk about," said

Skippy to himself as he fidgeted with the soup. "What an awful bore society is."

There was Maude Adams, but how was he to get to her?

"I 'm just crazy about harps," said Miss Cantillon, who was clever. "I think they 're wonderful."

"Harps — oh yes," said Charles Balou.

Miss Cantillon appealed to the table.

"Do you like them better than violins?" said Miss Barrons doubtfully.

"Oh much better!"

"They 're too big," said Snorky wisely.

"Yes, that is the trouble. It 's a perfect shame too. They are too big to carry round but they are so melodious. I don't like the piano — it 's so cold —"

While the conversation raged on the proper classification of musical instruments, Miss Balou turned from Snorky to Skippy and looked him once more in the eyes with her interested glance.

"Yes, I 've heard a lot about you," she said with a knowing look.

"Really now?"

"You 're a perfectly ghastly flirt," she said, lowering her voice. "You give a girl a terrific rush for a week or two and then pop off without even saying good-bye. Never mind though. I 'm warned."

Again the look, the interested look of trying

to discover the secret of his fascination. It was quite unlike the way any other girl had ever looked at him. Other girls looked at you sidewise or averted their eyes when they met yours. But this was different. It was mocking, impertinent, insinuating, but it did not displease him. He saw that he had made an impression, an instantaneous impression. He mystified her perhaps but he interested her intensely. For the first time he had conquered with a look.

"Who told you?"

"That 's telling."

"I 'll bet I know."

"Bet you don't."

"Bet I do."

"What 'll you bet?"

"Two pounds of chocolates against a necktie."

"Done, who is it?"

"Some one here."

"Nope. You 've lost."

"Who then?"

"Some one who knows Dolly Travers," said Vivi with a mocking smile.

"Oh!"

"Brute," said Vivi in the greatest admiration.

"Really I—"

"Now don't be modest—I hate modest men. It makes it twice as bad. She 's very attractive, is n't she?"

"Very," said Skippy, feeling every inch a man.

"But she 's rather young — for you, is n't she?" said Vivi artfully.

"They put glasses on cows in Russia," said Miss Cantillon importantly. She had a reputation as a brilliant conversationalist to uphold.

This assertion woke up the table.

"Cows?"

"Glasses?"

"Fanny dear, how excruciating!"

Even the sophomore was surprised into expressing his incredulity.

"Colored glasses on account of the glare of the snow," said Miss Cantillon.

"Fanny!"

"Fact, in Siberia. I read it in the papers."

"Cows can't live in the snow."

"But Siberia is n't all snow."

"Most of it is."

"Is n't it wonderful the things she knows?" said Vivi admiringly. "Do you like brainy women?"

"That depends," said Skippy while he stopped to consider. "I don't know any."

"Oh what a dreadful cynical remark!" said Vivi with another admiring look. "Heavens, I shall be frightened to death what I say to you. I 'm sure you 're awfully clever yourself. Perhaps I 'll have a chance. Clever men hate clever women, don't they?"

"There is certainly something about my particular style of beauty that 's bowled her over," thought Skippy to himself.

"Oh I don't know," he said, fatuously unconscious of the virtues he conceded to himself. "Dolly Travers was quite clever, you know."

"Brute!" said Miss Balou for the second time.

"Oh come now—"

"Do you know what I think about you?"

"What do you think?"

"I think you 'd be lots of excitement at a house party," said Miss Vivi, shaking her head. "Just for a few days. I think you 'd give a girl the grandest sort of a rush, but as for believing a word you said—never!"

"What do you mean?" said Skippy, immensely puffed up.

"It shows in your eyes," said Vivi with a look of having at last deciphered the mystery. "Besides, girls have spoiled you. You have had things too easily. No wonder you 're conceited."

Miss Cantillon was discoursing brilliantly on a crow that had been struck by lightning in Oklahoma and had fallen into a wheat field and set fire to the grain, which had precipitated a conflagration which had necessitated calling out the fire departments of two counties.

"You 're offended now," said Vivi in a contrite whisper.

"Some one 's given you an awfully bad opinion of me," said Skippy stiffly, frowning to show the displeasure he did not feel.

"Well it 's true, is n't it?"

"It is not!"

"How about Jennie Tupper?"

"Oh that!" said Skippy burying the memory with a wave of his hand.

"You see you *are* a brute! Well I don't mind. I like your hands."

Skippy took a precautionary glance at the ends of his baseball fingers and then allowed them to come to rest on the tablecloth.

"Now you 're trying to jolly me," he said astutely.

"No. I always notice hands the first thing. They tell so much about your character. I saw yours at once."

"You can read hands?" said Skippy, who knew this much of the etiquette of the game.

"Yes, but not now," said Vivi in a promissory tone.

Skippy's attitude towards social functions underwent a change of front. He began to feel confidently, vaingloriously at ease. He joined in the general conversation determined to rout the brilliant Miss Cantillon, who knew so many things. Now the rule for such preëminence is simple and some acquire it by cunning and others by instinct. Deny the obvious. Reputations have fattened on nothing else. When in-

evitably the moment arrived to discuss Maude Adams, and her latest play, Skippy announced that he did not like Maude Adams.

"Not like Maude Adams!"

There was a sudden silence and all eyes were turned expectantly toward him as to a manifestly superior intelligence. Finally the swinger of dumb-bells voiced the question.

"But why?"

Skippy considered.

"Too much like Maude Adams," he said cryptically.

Vivi looked at him in admiration.

"How clever, I never thought of that."

"Well, I 'm just frantic about Maude Adams!" said the athletic Miss Barrons stubbornly.

"Because you like Maude Adams," said Skippy as a clincher.

By one bold stroke he had become a personage and what is more perceived that he had become one. Different topics were served up for his judgment. He pronounced flatly against colleges for women, woman suffrage and bobbed hair, predicted the election of Mr. Bryan and the probable division of the United States into four separate republics. Even Snorky Green, who was floundering along on the subject of blazers *vs.* sweaters, was impressed, and as for Miss Cantillon, she tried to stir up a little commotion by introducing the subject of The Lady

from Narragansett who had removed freckles by watermelon rinds, but the effect was tepid and she relapsed into a listener.

"Say, where did you get it?" said Snorky in a whisper as they passed out to the veranda.

"Get what?"

"All this bright boy stuff! Why you 're the little boy orator yourself."

"I 'll tell you how it 's done sometime," said Skippy magnificently.

"Do you like views?" said Vivi, coming to him as a moth to the brightest flame.

"That depends," said Skippy, who being still in a mood of negation was unwilling to concede anything.

Miss Vivi accepted this as acquiescence and, it being early moonlight and dangerous underfoot, took his hand to lead him safely around the flower beds. Skippy having just discovered the secret to success encased himself in indifference and waited developments.

"Is n't it romantic! Don't you *love* it?" she said, arrived at a little summer house that jutted out over the darkling waters.

"It 's rather nice," said Skippy, sternly repressing his emotional tendencies.

Vivi now ostentatiously disengaged her hand.

"Please."

"Is it safe now?" said Skippy anxiously.

"How perfectly horrid of you," said the young lady in pretended indignation. "You

make fun of everything, even the most sacred things."

The relevancy of this was lost on Skippy who condescended to say,

"View isn't half bad if the moon weren't so dreadfully lopsided."

"Unsentimental wretch! I suppose you want to go back?" said Vivi reproachfully.

"Are there mosquitoes?"

"Just for that I'll keep you here until you 're eaten up," said Vivi, plucking a spray of honeysuckle and inhaling it with a sigh. "Isn't it wonderful, don't you adore honeysuckle in the moonlight?" she added, transferring it to his inspection.

Skippy inhaled it loudly and announced that it was all right.

"Jelly fish," said Vivi throwing it away indignantly.

Skippy resented "jelly fish."

"Well you are! I never saw such a cold calculating unemotional brute. You 're nothing but a great big icy brain."

Skippy thought of the Roman and a hundred flunkings.

"Better pull in on the infant phenom—Snorky might hear of it," he thought.

"Oh, I like it here," he said in a more romantic tone.

"Really?"

"Yep."

A long silence and Vivi inhaled another sprig of honeysuckle and devoured the moon.

"How long you going to stay?"

"About a week."

"Oh!"

Another silence.

"You 're so different."

"How?"

"Don't know but you are — quite, quite different. You seem so much older than Arthur."

"Well that all depends," said Skippy, ready to draw on his imagination.

"You 've seen a lot of life, have n't you?"

"Yes I suppose so."

"I saw that — in your hands."

"I say, how about reading my character now?"

"No, not now, sometime later, perhaps."

"Perhaps?"

"Well I don't know if I 'd dare. What are you doing to-morrow?"

"Nothing particular."

"Suppose we get up a hay ride and a picnic. The moon will be glorious."

"Bacon and roast corn? Hurray!" said Skippy, most unromantically.

Vivi got up suddenly.

"Let 's go back."

"All right, but it 's awfully dark."

"Follow me."

Skippy walked purposely into the first flower bed.

"Help, I 'm lost!"

Vivi stood considering.

"Are you sorry?"

"Dreadfully. Ouch, I 'm in a rose bush!"

"And you promise not to be cynical and aloof?"

"Cross my heart and hope to die," said Skippy, very well pleased with himself.

Immediately the hand was offered and retained. To be magnanimous he gave it a little extra squeeze.

"That 's not fair," said Vivi.

"All 's fair in love and war," said Skippy who, under the influence of outward conditions, momentarily forgot his rôle.

"My aunt's cat's pants," said Snorky enviously, when they had departed. "You 're getting to be a rapid worker, old top, you certainly are!"

"Oh I 've learned a thing or two," said Skippy pompously.

"Splash with your toes, old horse," said Snorky, shaking his head. "Look out, Vivi's an old stager. She collects them."

"What?"

"Scalps," said Snorky with a significant gesture.

"Just watch me."

"You don't say so."

"I 've got her feeding out of my hand, gentle as a lamb," said Skippy, remembering with a pleasant tickling sensation the mystified fascination of her way of looking at him.

"Cheese it," said Snorky shaking his head.

"This is different."

"Whoa, old horse, whoa!"

"Snorky, old gal," said Skippy, who had now settled down into the predatory vision Miss Vivi had artfully evoked, "it 's easy when you know the game."

"And what 's the game?"

"Don't get tagged."

"Elucidate."

"Keep 'em running after you. It 's the first one who runs away who wins every time."

"Oh, simple as that?"

"Sure, that 's all there is to it."

"Let 'em love you, eh?"

"Oh well," said Skippy modestly, but as he sought his bed he stole a satisfied glance into the mirror.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Splashing With Your Toes

FOR the next six days Skippy was a very busy young man. He had a reputation to sustain. The reputation was quite unjustified but that did not alter matters. Miss Balou had given it to him and Miss Balou must not be disappointed. In the shifting comedy of life, Skippy was now cast for the part of the Demon Rusher. In those early ambling days before the automobile and the aeroplane had brought their escape valves for human energy, the steam pressure of youth sometimes found expression in what was known as the rush. As the name implies the object of the male participant was to carry all before him in cyclonic style, to dazzle and overwhelm the breathless and bewildered lady by the blinding rapidity of his showered attentions. By mutual consent nothing binding was ever implied in this form of acrobatic sentiment and the knell was sounded when either party paused for breath. When a rush began all bystanders withdrew as a matter of etiquette and waited for the dust to subside, much as, in the Simian days of the race, the lesser monkeys sat on a branch and hugged themselves when the big monk came courting.

Skippy borrowed a bicycle and departed from the home of his chum directly after breakfast, having likewise borrowed various brilliant bits of manly luxury which flashed from his ankles, his neck and his breast pocket. At exactly nine o'clock as though by accident Miss Vivi's trim figure daintily balanced on the smartest of "Safety" bicycles appeared from the Balou driveway and the following brilliant opening occurred.

"Why, Jack. What are you doing up so early?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Where are you going?"

"Same place you're going."

"Who asked you?"

"You 're going to."

"How d'you know."

"Somebody's eyes have told me so," said Skippy in an unmusical treble.

Vivi pretended to be immensely offended, Skippy was immensely concerned that she should be offended. There was a long discussion whether he had really offended, whether he should be really forgiven and whether he really intended to renounce such airs of proprietorship in the future. By this time the two bicycles were close together with Skippy's hands on her handle-bars and the terms of peace were concluded by the young lady condescending to return to his appreciative gaze from under-

neath the lace brim of her hat whither she had taken refuge. They bicycled along the beach and Skippy expressed his wonder at the extent of her wardrobe. Vivi then remarked appreciatively upon his (or rather Snorky's) necktie. The conversation then expanded, easily and naturally along classic lines.

The theory was simplicity itself—who knows, perhaps it has remained the same to this day! For the twelve hours consecrated to each other's society each day, Skippy denied what Vivi affirmed unless it happened that Vivi doubted what Skippy stated as a fact. There were of course many ramifications, sometimes it was a question of you did and you didn't, sometimes it was and it wasn't, while any future speculation was confined to you will and you won't. As a matter of fact, nothing that was said really mattered and each knew it. Words were only so many verbal flourishes in the most fascinating of duels. Each played at the undying passion with open parades and each was only secretly concerned with bearing away the other's scalp.

They canoed together, walked together, picnicked together, making only short public appearances at the beach for the swimming hour and the evening hop. When they came to the club house they came late and danced together on the porch to escape the exigencies of society. If some unfeeling brute did arrive to claim

Vivi, it was always understood that the next dance reverted to Skippy, who meanwhile (this was de rigeur) sat on the railing and looked dreadfully dejected. It was all very serious business, strenuous as training for the football team — but Skippy never relaxed. He had a reputation to sustain. Snorky gave him up for lost. He no longer sought to warn him, but each night simply as a matter of ceremony he passed his hand solicitously over the shock of stubby hair which adorned Skippy's elongated cranium just to assure himself that the scalp remained unbroken.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Skippy Retires With His Scalp

CAME the last day. End of the summer, of summer's warmth. End of languid siestas on drowsy beaches, end of balmy moonlight nights, moonlight sails, moonlight picnics; end of intimate whispered half laughing, half serious intimacies *à deux*. To-morrow separation and a man's life to take up again! To-morrow the chill of autumn and the melancholy of drifting leaves. The last partings to take, promises to be solemnly exchanged — heart burnings, bottom dropped out of everything, another milestone to be registered in the scurrying flight of Time!

Mr. Skippy Bedelle and Miss Vivi Balou separated themselves from the unromantic middle-aged crowd around the tennis courts and made their way up the beach to the sheltering swirls of convenient sand dunes. They walked in silence, oppressed by the greatness of their grief, from time to time their shoulders touched in dumb understanding.

"To-morrow!" said Skippy with a gulp in his throat.

"Don't!"

"To-morrow — gee!"

He carried a beach chair, four sofa cushions, two rugs, her work-bag, a box of chocolates and a romance they had dipped into.

"Don't!" repeated Miss Vivi, gazing out from under her pink parasol with stricken eyes at the unending sea.

"To-morrow afternoon at this time!"

"It 's been wonderful — wonderful week."

He made a back of the chair, spread the rug and installed her solicitously. Then he camped down not too far away, not too near, pulled his cap over his eyes, locked his hands over his knees and stared out toward the horizon that, somehow, attracts at such moments.

A wind that was already cold played over the frosty waves and sent little scurries of sand twisting along the beach.

"Have a chocolate?"

"Thanks."

"Jelly or nut?"

"Nut. Thanks."

They munched in silence.

"That 's the trouble with summer," said Skippy at last.

"Yes, is n't it?"

"It 's rotten."

"Oh why must everything end?" said Vivi wildly.

"I can't realize that to-morrow —"

"You 'll forget, men always forget."

Skippy shook his head.

"Yes. You 'll write a letter or two and then heigh ho!"

"Look here, you don't mean that," said Skippy, turning on her.

Vivi's eyes dropped before his righteous indignation.

"No — no I don't mean that."

"Then don't talk that way — especially just now."

"Forgive me — Jack?"

"What?"

"You do forgive me?"

"Of course."

"You 're going to do wonderful things at school," said Vivi, trying to be brave, "and I 'm going to be so proud to think I know you."

"Do you think they 'll let you come down to the Andover game?"

"I don't know about the game — but the Prom!"

"Gee, you 'll be a knockout there!"

They ate more chocolates, while Skippy debated how to lead the conversation into the softer strain before bestowing on the object of his affections (for value exchanged, of course) the sacred emblem of the Philomathean Debating Society and bringing forth the Lawrenceville banner which was tightly folded up in his bulging hip pocket.

"I suppose you 'll go back now to Dolly Travers," said Vivi, whose appetite for verbal

expressions of sentiment was still far from being satisfied. "And forget all about—about this wonderful week."

"Women are fickler than men," said Skippy gloomily.

"Not—not always."

"Don't believe it."

"Out of sight out of mind."

"You know better than that," said Skippy, digging into his change pocket for the pin.

"How do I know?" said Vivi encouragingly.

"Because—" Suddenly Skippy remembered. His fingers relaxed on the pin. He brought forth his hand. "Say, you promised to read my hand you know."

"Did I?"

"Sure you did."

Miss Vivi sat up and carefully pillowed the squat calloused hand in her soft one. For a moment she studied it, turning it over and back again, running her finger meditatively over the mounds and depressions.

"Well?" said Skippy anxiously.

"Shall I tell all?"

"Everything."

"You have a very strong will—very obstinate and not easily influenced. Ambition will be your god and you will sacrifice—" Vivi hesitated.

"I say, go on."

"So far is true, is n't it?"

"Well, pretty true," said Skippy, who began to enjoy his portrait.

"You will sacrifice everything to your ambition — friends, family, the woman who loves you."

"Oh, I say!"

"It 's here in your hand," said Vivi, shocked at the discovery. "Women will play very little part in your life. It 's not that you have n't a lot to give, you have. See this bump, that 's affection. It 's very developed."

"That 's where I threw my thumb out of joint," said Skippy doubtfully.

"But you 've had a terrible experience in your life that has shaken your faith and you are afraid to trust again." Skippy looked the picture of gloom at this and thought bitterly on Mimi Lafontaine after hesitating once or twice on the backward journey. "This has made you cynical and cold, ready to impute the lowest motives. Women will love you — many women, but you will give your heart only once more — and that — *that* will be a tragedy, on account of your own lack of faith."

"Say, is all that there?" said Skippy, beginning to be alarmed.

"That and more," said Vivi, warming up. "You are very loyal, not at all conceited, brilliant intellectual qualities and you will make a success —" Here Vivi paused and turned his

hand over, studying it carefully. "I see railroads and banking in your hand."

"Do you think so?" said Skippy unconvinced.

"There it is. You will make loads and loads of money."

"I say, do I get married?"

"That is not quite clear," said Vivi frowning. "This looks like it — but again this line — the cold calculating streak in your nature —"

At this moment, from down the beach, came a shrill whistle imitative of the whip-poor-will, insistent, querulous and repeated.

Vivi dropped his hand and glanced hastily at her watch.

"Good heavens, it 's four o'clock!"

"All right, I 'm on. Who 's the little bird?" said Skippy, who had not heard himself described as the acme of suspicion for nothing.

"Jack!"

The whip-poor-will rose to shriller heights.

"It 's Charlie Brownrigger," said Vivi, trying to appear embarrassed, "and he 's come round to say good-bye."

"Oh, indeed."

"I *had* to let him say good-bye," said Vivi imploringly to the young sultan. "I 've treated him abominably since you came. I can't be rude to a chap, can I? I 'll be right back."

"How long 's it going to take?" asked Skippy, drawing out his watch.

"Oh about twenty minutes," said Vivi.

"I 'll wait exactly half an hour. Four-thirty to the minute. Not a second more."

"I do believe you 're jealous, Jack Bedelle!" said Vivi expectantly.

"Jealousy has no part in my nature," said Skippy loftily. "Besides you can see it in my hand. Firmness, that 's all!"

"Brute!" said Vivi with a killing glance.

She picked up the pink parasol and hastened down the beach. Skippy fished out the Philomathean Debating Society pin and slowly attached it to his vest. He switched to the vacated place with the back rest and began to whistle to himself. At the end of a seeming hour he glanced at his watch. Exactly seven minutes had elapsed.

"Half an hour was a mistake. Fifteen minutes is enough for a mut like Brownrigger. I should have been firmer. When a girl gets you to waiting for her — she has you going and coming. Firmer, I should have been much firmer!"

He slipped off his shoes to empty them of sand, and in doing so filled the gayly coloured work-bag that was Vivi's. His toilette finished, he took up the bag to clean it in turn. At the first touch as fate had decreed a book tumbled out and lay with opened pages before him. It looked most suspiciously like a diary. He averted his eyes and then his glance came slowly back to it.

"Here, that's not square," he said to himself angrily, torn by a mighty temptation. He leaned over and closed the book abruptly. The next moment he was staring at three gilded words that confronted him with the suddenness of Belshazzar's vision:

THE CHAP RECORD

A sudden brain storm swept over the emotional nature of Mr. Skippy Bedelle, of the sort which in modern legal etiquette is held to excuse all crimes. He knew what a chap record was. He had found one in his sister Clara's bureau and had been lavishly paid for his silence. He opened it violently and this is what he read:

Harry Felton. June 30–Sept. 6th. Good-looking in a soapy sort of way, but dull: Good dancer, agonizingly slow at a twosing. Takes what you give him and is grateful. Good for last minute calls.

Joe Randolph. July 2d–August 6th. Awfully lavish and liberal. Spoiled and hard to keep in place. Useful later. Salt away for College Prom.

Charles Brownrigger. Xmas to—. Terribly proper and easily shocked. Every girl an angel. Seeking a good influence. Good only for concerts and lectures.

Charlie Duler. Easter vacation. Profes-

sional flirt. Tried hard for him but no go. On to all the old tricks. Too much alike.

Hector Chisolm. May 3 to May 6th. Three day rush fast and furious. Nice teeth and eyes, cold English style in daytime but wilts rapidly in the moonlight. Dreadfully exciting. Au revoir!

Having thus wandered through the carnage, Skippy braced himself and read:

Jack Bedelle. August 20th — Dreadfully young and conceited, feed him on flattery — nice eyes but funny nose — poor conversationalist but works hard. Dreadful dancer. Pretends indifference but awfully soft in spots. Hooked him in twenty minutes —

Skippy laid the book down in his lap and glanced up the beach which showed no signs of an advancing parasol. Then he looked at his watch which indicated exactly the half hour. He sat a long moment thinking. Then he opened the book and at the paragraph devoted to him he added:

"Easy to hook is hard to hold."

But this did not satisfy him. He stood up and suddenly inspired sunk to his knees and hurriedly gathered together the sand into a mound capable of burying Miss Vivi's little

body. Across it he laid the opened book. At its head he placed the box of chocolates as a headstone. Then below he wrote in the sand (symbol indeed of transient loves):

SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
VIOLET BALOU
SLAIN BY HER OWN HAND
August 27th, 1896.

Then as a masterly afterthought he added savagely:

GONE AND NOW FORGOTTEN

Mr. Skippy Bedelle then wriggled away through the sand dunes just as Miss Vivi Balou with malice aforethought came up the beach accompanied by Mr. Charles Brownrigger.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

The Philosophical Attitude

IT happened on the day before school opened; at that moment when Skippy returning from his first sentimental summer had no other thought than to rest up from the fatigue of the vacation and devote his activities to the serious business of life. There were the freshman (a discouraging lot) to be properly educated, taught to punctuate their sentences with a humble "sir," "if you please" and "thank you;" there was a certain score to be settled with Al at the Jigger Shop and the basis of a new credit to be argued, there was the prize room on the third floor overlooking the campus to be re-decorated with the loot of the summer, and one crucial question to be decided forthwith:

"Shall we start training now or gorge ourselves for just one more day?"

"The Jiggers are peach, soft and creamy," said Snorky with a pensive look. "But we should set an example you know, old top, and all that sort of thing."

"Keerect, we must."

"I can see the crowd up at Conover's putting away the pancakes," said Snorky insidiously.

"Be firm," said Skippy, returning to his trunk.

"It isn't only the Jiggers," said Snorky, who sometimes practised virtue but without the slightest enthusiasm, "it 's — it 's those éclairs — never tasted anything like them, big, fat, luscious, oozing with cream —"

"Shut up," said Skippy indignantly. "Where 's your house spirit?"

"Can't a fellow be human?" said Snorky in an aggrieved tone.

"All right, all right — but put your mind on other things," said Skippy nervously.

He disengaged an armful from the bottom of his trunk and spreading it on the window seat, contemplated the touch of many feminine hands with an expression that was as cynically blasé as that of the traditional predatory bachelor. Whenever Skippy found a mood too elusive to be expressed in words, his lips instinctively resorted to boyhood's musical outlet. His eyes traveled appraisingly over sofa cushions, picture frames, knitted neckties and flags that represent those select institutions where young ladies are finished off. He began to whistle,

> "I don't want to play in your yard,
> I don't like you any more . . . "

"My, you 're a cold-hearted brute," said Snorky, in whom perhaps the spirit of envy was strong.

"I am," said Skippy unctuously, "and I am

going to be brutier, take a tip from yours truly, *Moony.*"

He disposed of half a dozen cushions, draped two flags and carefully placed three photographs amid the gallery on his bureau.

"Do you think that 's honorable?" said Snorky resentfully.

"Scalps, that 's all!" said Skippy with a grandiloquent wave of his hand.

"I get you. Heart whole and fancy free etcetera etceteray?"

"Every time."

"Since when?" said Snorky wickedly.

Skippy allowed this to pass, but having pensively contemplated the effect produced by the addition of Miss Dolly Travers, Miss Jennie Tupper and Miss Vivi Balou to the adoring galaxy of the past, he swung a leg over the table and assuming that newly acquired manner of a man of the world, which was specially galling to his chum, announced,

"Snorky, old horse, you play it wrong."

"I do, eh?"

"You do. There 's nothing in that fussing game. Women, my boy, are our inferiors."

"Well, it took you some time to find it out."

"Keerect, but now I 'm wise. Woman is like a harp in the desert, played upon by every passing wind."

"Where 'd ye read that?"

"If you 're going in for that sort of thing get

promiscuous. The only cure for one woman is another."

"You ought to know."

"Are you corresponding with Margarita?" said Skippy suddenly.

"And if I am?"

Skippy shook his head sadly.

"Woman—" he began sententiously and just then fate knocked at the door.

"Come in if you 're good-looking," said Snorky, glad of the interruption.

The door opened and discovered a short bulbous freshman, just a whit embarrassed as freshmen should be in the presence of royalty.

"Oh well, come in any way," said Skippy. "What 's your name, freshman!"

"Potterman," said the rotund youngster squeezing in.

"Sir."

"Sir."

"What 's the rest of it—the handle, the nickname."

"Are we telling our real names?" said the new arrival, cocking his derby.

"Green, get out the bamboo cane," said Skippy solemnly.

"Oh well, they call me Hippo—sir," said Potterman hastily.

"Ah yes, Hippo Potterman. Of course. That 's good, but we 'll try to do better by you. Where did they find you?"

"Philamedelphia, sir."

"What 's that you 've got there?" said Snorky just about to fall upon him bodily.

"Please, sir, it 's a letter from Mrs. Bedelle, your aunt."

"Oh, I see," said Skippy with a feeling of disappointment. "You know my aunt? Well, freshman, you may give it to me. I permit you. Advance. That 's it. Curtsey. A little lower. Better."

DEAR JACK,

My very dear friend Susan Potterman is sending her son Cornelius —

Skippy frowned and looked up incredulously.

"Is your name really Cornelius?"

Potterman flushed like the rose and said with a gulp:

"Yes, sir, it is."

"Too bad, too bad."

son Cornelius to Lawrenceville. Please do everything you can to make him at home and see that he meets the *best* boys. His mother and sister will go on with him and I want you *paticularly* to be *very* nice to them.

Affectionately,
AUNT CARRIE.

Skippy having read this twice, looked in the envelope to make sure that a five dollar bill was not enclosed, as all aunts should remember to do, and transferred his gaze to the fidgeting Hippo.

"H 'm, first time at boarding school?"

"Yes, sir."

"Governesses before?"

Hippo, who had been recovering from his first feeling of awe, roared loudly at this.

Skippy looked indignantly at this breach of etiquette and reached thoughtfully for a tennis racket.

"Please, sir," said Hippo hastily, "High school."

Skippy considered him thoughtfully and something told him that in the right-hand lower vest pocket there was undoubtedly a certain amount of round hard silver bodies and moreover that this condition was not simply episodic but chronic.

"That coot may be fresh but he is going to do a lot of heavy spending," he said to himself with conviction.

How he knew is immaterial. There is an instinct that guides — some have it, some have n't it. You can't explain it. Doc Macnooder for instance could diagnose a pocket-book as keenly as a surgeon. It 's a gift, that 's all. Skippy possessed this gift.

"Mother just brought you in?"

Hippo acknowledged this with a look of the greatest distress.

"Sister too?"

"Damn it, yes!"

Skippy looked at Snorky and shook his head.

"Don't you know that profanity is a wicked, wicked habit, Hippo?"

Hippo's mouth started to swallow his ears, then returned to rest at signs of a hostile atmosphere. He swung from foot to foot, looked sheepish, looked terrified and finally blurted out:

"I beg pardon, sir."

"It is a wicked habit, Hippo, but we are here to help you. It is very lucky for you that you have come to the right school, where you will meet boys of fine manly standards. Kneel down, Hippo."

"What, sir?"

"Go over to the bed and kneel down," said Skippy in a voice of great sadness. "Don't hesitate, Hippo. That 's better. Now, Hippo, I want you to reflect upon what a wicked, wicked thing profanity is and I want you to ask God to forgive you and help you. Silently, Hippo."

Hippo, who was green and fresh but not at all green and gullible, went through the prescribed program with the utmost gravity.

"Do you feel better now, Hippo?" said Snorky solemnly.

"Yes, sir, but I 'd like a little more time, sir."

"Stand up," said Skippy frowning.

Hippo, unchastened, bounded to his feet and saluted.

"And, Hippo, I 'm afraid," said Skippy relentlessly, "that you don't appreciate what a mother's love means. Think how your mother has watched over you all these years, think how

she has scrubbed behind your ears, think of the hundreds and hundreds of toothbrushes —''

But at this, as Snorky gulped and barely converted a laugh into a sneeze with a hurried dive into the closet, Skippy abandoning his pedagogical air said in a more natural tone:

''Well, Hippo, I shall want to talk with you very seriously on this some other time. Your manners are shocking and your morals worse, but I am here. Don't worry. Meanwhile, ahem, you can bring your family in to tea.''

''Thank you, kind sir.''

''Hippo, you are fresh.''

''But you *are* kind, aren't you, sir?'' said Hippo with assumed innocence.

''Get your hat and wait downstairs,'' said Skippy deciding to abandon the lighter tone.

''Yes, sir.''

''Hippo?''

''What, sir?''

''Don't forget.''

''What, sir?''

''The curtsey, you know.''

A quarter of an hour later Skippy and Snorky with Hippo in tow started across the campus to show their protégé the historic spots, beginning with Laloo's where the merry hot dogs whistled to one another in steaming cans, by way of Bill Appleby's where ginger-pop and root-beer waited, to the Jigger Shop where the

Jigger cooled and Conover's where the pancake sizzled.

Opposite the Jigger Shop the celebrated Doc Macnooder, resplendent in a varsity sweater, was surveying the hungry Jigger-fed crowd and debating whether to go right up and pay for his sustenance or wait a little longer and see what might turn up.

"Well, Skippy, been inventing anything new?" said Macnooder pleasantly after the introductions.

"I say, Doc, I want to put it up to you," said Skippy hastily, for he feared any reference to bathtubs or mosquitoes might detract from the respect which was essential in Hippo. "I 'm out for the scrub, you know, and what I wanted to ask you was do you think training ought to start now or wait until school opens."

Macnooder's mind scorned subleties. It moved by the shortest cuts to the practical issue.

"Has he got the price?" he said looking at Hippo.

"He has."

"Let 's eat."

Macnooder looked appraisingly at Hippo, whom Nature had destined to play at center rush, to be mauled and cuffed and suffocated under scores of scuffling, struggling bodies. A flicker of sympathy should have stirred, but it did n't.

"You 'll need quite a lot of stuff," he said pensively.

"Nothing doing, Doc," said Skippy, winking hard at his protégé. "Hippo 's fitted out."

"How about fountain-pens or crockery sets, or patent nail clippers?"

"I dote on fountain-pens," began Hippo.

"Hippo's under my protection," said Skippy militantly. "We 're sort of related."

"Oh well, let 's eat then," said Macnooder with a reluctant look.

"Don't take anything from that fellow even if he gives it to you," said Skippy in a whisper to Hippo. "Elucidations later."

Al had two attitudes of welcome, according to the record of the books, one in which the hand advanced impulsively and a smile broke from under the shaggy yellow bang and another where the hand remained in a stationary receptive cup, or sometimes caressed the limp ends of the mustache in a way most discouraging and disheartening to the delinquent debtor. When Doc Macnooder arrived, however, he paid him the further honor to carefully close the glass cases where éclair and fruit cake were waiting the call to service, and braced himself against the counter.

"Hello, Al," said Skippy affably, "here we are again. Set 'em up four times."

"I see you and I see that there Doc Macnooder," said Al in an unconvinced sort of way.

"Set 'em up," said Macnooder in an encouraging tone.

"*Who's* settin' 'em up?" said Al, resorting to his toothpick.

Macnooder looked at Skippy, Skippy looked at Snorky, then all three looked at Hippo.

"The pleasure is mine," said Hippo and with a purse-proud gesture he flicked on the counter a twenty dollar bill.

Al was not easily shocked but for once his perfect manner left him. He glanced at Hippo and then enviously at Macnooder.

"I didn't know they picked them as early as that," he said enigmatically. "Doc, you 'll be buying this place in a week."

"I could buy it now," said Macnooder frowning, "and Al, step to the back and have a little business talk with me."

Al, having received payment and displayed the Jiggers, left for the back of the store to that secluded nook which had heard a hundred explanations and supplications from the improvident and hungry. Skippy, who despite the new assurance of his public manner, was willing to learn at the feet of a master, Jigger in hand, moved into a position of eavesdropping.

"Nineteen dollars and seventy-two cents," said Al, coming to the point.

"Exactly what my little proposition comes to," said Macnooder affably. "Tear it up, Al, you 'll do it sooner or later so why not now?"

"What 's the flim-flam?" said Al, who recognized in Macnooder qualities of a superior intelligence.

"I don't like the word," said Macnooder in a pained tone. "I 've got an idea and you 're going to buy it. Al, the Jigger Shop has had a cinch, a monopoly, a trust. You fixed prices and you 've controlled the output. Now answer me, yes or no. Have you ever paid out one cent in commissions?"

"Get to the point."

"I will. I have an idea, I might say a brilliant idea and when I say I like the idea better than any idea I can remember — you know me — I 'm modest, but Al, it 's a wonder. You 'll like it. No, change that line, you may not like it but you 'll respect it. Al, I 'm going to let you in, give you the first chance. Conover would double the commission. Appleby would go wild over it. But, Al, I 'm giving *you* the first chance."

"Nineteen dollars and seventy-two cents," said Al, making a motion to close his ears.

"Not a cent less," said Macnooder firmly, who according to his manner, having produced the proper hypnotic effect, now came to the point. "Sit down, Al, if you won't sit down — brace yourself. The idea 's coming now and the idea 's loaded with dynamite. Suppose, I say suppose, it was in my power to boycott you."

"God Almighty could n't do that," said Al.

"Not as you see it — you 're right there, Al, shrewd and clever! Al, there are ten freshmen in the Dickinson. Think hard now, the idea 's growing. Ten freshmen. Suppose, — I only say suppose now that as a disciplinary measure we should decide that no freshman could enter the Jigger Shop say — well let 's be moderate — for the space of three months. We might let them go to Conover's or Laloo's and then again —"

"Macnooder," said Al explosively, "when they lead you to the gallows I 'll be sitting right up front if it cost every cent I have."

"Al, you grieve me."

"It 's blackmail! It 's extortion and blame it I believe you 'd do it."

"No, Al, it 's not blackmail, it 's not extortion. If I came to you and said out and out, flat, tear up that account of mine or I 'll boycott you — *that*, Al, that would be all you say."

"My Gawd, Doc, why do you waste your time in this little place anyhow?"

"You see, Al, it 's this way," said Macnooder, smiling at the compliment, "I 'm coming to you as Macnooder your attorney, that 's one person, to use his influence with Macnooder the financier, that 's another person — I 'm a lobbyist, a paid lobbyist."

"Nineteen dollars and seventy-two cents," said Al in a fainter voice.

"Al, I 'm surprised and shocked. I thought your mind leaped at things. You don't see it yet. You 're thinking in terms of ten freshmen—"

"Nineteen doll . . . "

"But suppose the Dickinson lays down the law, suppose the Kennedy follows suit. You saw what that fellow flashed, a twenty dollar yellowback, a word to Skippy and the Kennedy would follow. Skippy, you understand, would have to be *protected*, you get that. Well, what would happen? Every house in the school would follow suit. What does that mean? Figure it out. It means one hundred freshmen multiplied by ninety days multiplied by at least two Jiggers a fresh — per day — you know how freshmen eat—"

But here, Skippy, terrified, tiptoed away. Macnooder aroused in him the lust for gold and he wished to retain a few simple ideals. He signaled Snorky and Hippo and escaped up the road to the home of the pancake.

"Doc Macnooder is a wonder but he 's not, well he 's not quite the sort of chap you want to associate with, Hippo. Understand?"

"I 'm young but I 'm not so green as all that," said Hippo winking wisely.

"In fact, Doc 's a sponge and you made an awful break."

"I did, what 's that, sir?"

"You should n't have shown him that twenty

dollar bill. He 'll never let up so long as he remembers that."

"Skippy 's right, Hippo," said Snorky.

"What 'll I do?"

"Leave it to us. We 'll think out some way."

After a good deal of thinking, they returned from a heavy performance at Conover's, laden with a large creamcake, a half dozen éclairs, a box of Huyler's and two pounds of Turkish paste, after placing an order for tinned meats, cheese, saltines and root-beer.

"I say, this sort of removes the lurking danger, does n't it?" said Hippo, searching in his pocket for the last half-dollar.

"We 'll store the grub in our rooms," said Snorky solemnly, "and then there won't be any danger at all."

"Oh, thank you, kind sir," said the irrepressible Hippo, and only the soothing presence of the layer cake against his breast kept Snorky from a mood of wrath.

"If you 've got to mother that little squirt," said Snorky wrathfully, once they had returned to their room, "you 'll have your hands full, that 's all I wish to remark. A fresher, nervier little nuisance—"

"Nuisance is going to get a lot of mothering," said Skippy with a far-off look in his eyes. "But remember, old dear, that 's why we 're here. That 's why the faculty invites us to Lawrenceville."

"Well," said Snorky as he stowed away the purchases and arranged the éclairs on the tea-table, "if we can keep him away from Doc Macnooder, there 's going to be a few compensations."

"Nuisance will neither be affectionate nor familiar by this time to-morrow," said Skippy grinding his teeth.

"Cheese it! Hide the towels—here they come!"

A knock and then the voice of Hippo in flippant familiarity:

"All right, Skippy, we 're good looking. Open up."

Skippy looked at Snorky and swallowed hard while his right arm worked convulsively.

"Come in," he said with an effort.

The door opened and Miss Potterman triumphantly entered his life. Mrs. Potterman was there and Hippo with his impertinent smirk but neither Skippy nor Snorky saw anything else but that wonderful vision. Something unbelievable had suddenly stepped out of their favorite Gibson picture and was advancing in a halo. Violets and daffodils began to sprout from the carpet and birds sang in the window frames. It was instantaneous and it was terrific.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Love Plus Hippo

JUST as there are professional conversationalists and professional sponges, Miss Potterman was a professional beauty. There was nothing accidental or temporary about her. She was complete, perfect, and she knew her loveliness. After five years' triumphant progress in society she was accustomed to the petrifying effect of her sudden presence on a beauty-worshipping sex. She did not walk as other mortals walk, but floated in fragrantly and Skippy stood staring rock-still, as though Hippo had flashed the head of Medusa. None of which by the way was lost on the keenly observant Hippo.

"I beg pardon, I 'm Skippy," he said shaking himself.

"Mr. Bedelle, is n't it?" said Miss Potterman in the tones that angels are supposed to employ.

Skippy saw no one else. In another moment he was seated on the window-seat entranced, dazed and blissfully content with his fate, docile as the rabbit in the presence of the boa constrictor.

"I 'm so glad Corny is in your house," said

Miss Potterman with a smile in the irresistible eyes. "You will watch over him, won't you, Mr. Bedelle?"

"Will I? You bet I will!"

"You see he 's my only brother and we did n't want him to go to boarding school — not just yet. That is, mother and I. Dad insisted on it. I don't think he 's always, well — quite appreciated Cornelius."

"I understand," said Skippy, averting his look. Even in the intoxication of her presence he could appreciate Dad.

"You see, Corny's different from other boys, Mr. Bedelle. He 's more like a grown-up person. He has a wonderful mind and such an unusual personality. I don't want him to lose it all and be just like every other boy. And some boys, I 'm afraid, won't understand him just at first. You will look after him, protect him, won't you?"

"I 'd promise *you* anything," said Skippy recklessly, which is the privilege of sixteen in the presence of twenty-five.

Miss Potterman smiled without surprise and laid her hand gently a moment on his arm in the deadliest of feminine gestures.

"Corny's told me how kind you have been already."

Skippy looked incredulous.

"Indeed he has. Really he 's quite fond of you already."

"I say, Sis," said Nuisance at this moment, "has n't Skippy got a whang-dinger of a room?"

And he approached with the layer cake and the éclairs.

"What a wonderful spread," said Miss Potterman, "but really you have been too extravagant!"

Something in Skippy's sudden look decided Hippo to keep the secret, but he revenged himself on the cake in a way that made his sister exclaim:

"Corny, where *are* your manners?"

" 'S all right. I 'll buy another," said Hippo, who then winked brazenly at Skippy.

"I 'll murder him, I will," said Skippy wrathfully to himself. "I 'd strip the hide off him, if it — if it were n't for —" Then he raised his eyes and beheld the reason why, smiling at him with perfect faith.

"I 'm afraid we 've spoiled Corny just a little," she said hesitating.

"Oh, that 's all right."

"Is — is there much of that dreadful hazing?"

"Well, sometimes," said Skippy, who always placed the proper value on his services.

"Oh dear, I 've heard such dreadful things have happened," said Miss Potterman, thoroughly alarmed.

"That 's only when accidents happen."

"Accidents!"

"Don't worry, Miss Potterman," said Skippy with the manner of a Grand Duke. "Fellows do get rough sometimes, but I'll look after him."

Miss Potterman again laid her hand on his arm.

"Thank you."

She stayed but half an hour. The door closed. The birds fled from the windows and the daffodils retired under the carpet.

"Whew!" said Snorky explosively.

Skippy fell back on a chair and fanned himself.

"What 's the use?" he said disconsolately.

"Women are our inferiors," said Snorky wickedly.

"What eyes!"

"Woman is like a harp—"

"Woman!" said Skippy rousing himself indignantly. "You don't call that a woman! That 's Maude Adams and Lorna Doone and—and the Gibson Girl rolled into one!"

"Don't blame you," said Snorky heavily. "It ain't right to let anything as wonderful as that roam around loose. Skippy, it 's all wrong."

"You 're right there."

"Well," said Snorky reflectively, "she turned up in time. We 'd have had Nuisance ready for the undertaker by the morning."

"My hands are tied," said Skippy glumly. "I 've promised."

"Me too, but how are we going to stick it out?"

"Well, we 'll have to treat Nuisance with moral influences," said Skippy thoughtfully. "It will be longer, longer and harder."

They dined with Miss Potterman at the Inn and that and a walk about the campus under the stars completed the devastation. Before it was over Skippy actually heard himself called "Jack," had shaken hands on an eternal friendship, promised to write from time to time of Hippo's progress and needs, agreed to defend him from bodily injury and promised to accompany him home for the short Thanksgiving recess. The final touch came when Miss Potterman sought to press upon him a large bill in case Hippo should be perishing of thirst or hunger.

Skippy put it away. It hurt to do so, it choked him, but he did it.

"Not from you — I could n't," he said huskily. "I — well, I just could n't."

That night as he stood at his bureau and looked into the eyes of the past, at Mimi and Dolly and Jennie and Vivi the hunter of scalps, he spoke.

"Snorky?"

"What is it, old boy?"

"Ever go fishing?"

"You betcha."

"Do you know the feeling after you 've been dabbling with six-inch and five-inch and four-inch trout all day, — and something about three feet long weighing ten or twelve pounds grabs your hook? Do you get me?"

"Sure, I get you," said Snorky gazing heavily out at the stars, "but oh gee, Skippy, why does she have to be Nuisance's sister?"

Snorky's worst forebodings were realized. Nuisance earned his title a hundredfold within the week. Dennis de Brian de Boru Finnegan had been fresh, was fresh and would freshen more, but Dennis was amusing and added to the gayety of nations. Nuisance was what his name implied, simply intolerable. You stumbled over him and you bumped into him. When state secrets were being discussed in whispers, Nuisance was always within earshot. He was the extra, the intruder, the tail to the kite. He did not actively offend against the traditions which govern freshmen in the incubator period. He was too clever for that. He had submitted to the mild hazing with a cheerfulness which robbed it of all its sting. He had climbed water towers and sung appropriate hymns. He had sat in washbasins and gravely pulled imaginary miles against the toothpicks furnished him as oars. He had submitted to the pi's as they came with a full recognition that the second and

third men in the mounting heap were extremely more uncomfortable than himself with a mattress for a vis-à-vis. He was not insubordinate —he was just a nuisance.

But if he kept skilfully within the letter of the law so far as the rest of the house was concerned he was irrepressible once in the company of Skippy. Nothing that Skippy could do could chill his affection or bring him to a proper realization of the deference which should mark the manner of a freshman towards one of the lords of the earth.

"Nuisance is like a wet muddy Newfoundland pup that wants to live in your lap," said Snorky at the end of the second week.

"Some day," said Skippy shaking his head, "my worse nature is going to rise up and get the better of me."

"I hope I see it!" said Snorky enthusiastically.

"Of course I 'll have to hold in until after Thanksgiving," said Skippy disconsolately.

"What? Oh, naturally."

CHAPTER XL

Reality Minus Hippo

THANKSGIVING over, Snorky confidently waited the explosion.

"Skippy 's going to the bad," he said to Dennis de Brian de Boru Finnegan. "He 's nervous, he 's fidgety, he talks in his sleep. There 's no living with him."

"Some day it 'll come," said Dennis cheerfully. "Some day there 'll be a bang-up, two by two procession, slow music, flowers omitted; and right on a nice green shutter will be stretched our Sister's darling boy."

"Well, I 'm getting tired of waiting."

"Keep hoping," said Dennis wisely. "Human nature is human nature. Say, look at that!"

Across the campus came Skippy, fists sunk in his pockets, hat-brim down, stalking rapidly, and at his heels the irrepressible Nuisance.

"It 's shocking," said Snorky, "poor old Skippy!"

"That 's what love means," said Finnegan contemptuously. "Do you know what he reminds me of? A poor lonely cur going down the road with a tin can tied to his tail."

"Hello, Skippy," said Snorky sadly.

Skippy looked at them and grunted.

At this moment Nuisance caught him by the arm.

"Say, old chap, what are you going to do now?"

"Going to bed, damn it!" said Skippy and bolted within.

How could Snorky and Dennis that unworldly fledgling know what Skippy suffered? The forty-eight hours of the Thanksgiving vacation had been like a narcotic dream. He had been under the same roof with her, sat by her side in the darkened theatre and thrilled at the low sobby music that sent his imagination helter-skelter into dangerous pastures; received her confidences, gravely discussed with her the character and eligibility of older men, confided in turn his life 's project to launch mosquito-proof socks on a world scale; received the full force of her lovely radiant gentlest of smiles; danced with her alone a whole hour in the Potterman ballroom, suffocated with happiness; and for all of which had promised what? To wear Nuisance about his neck like a millstone, to protect, cherish and guide him through the perils and temptations of boarding-school as though — as though he were his own brother. And Nuisance knew! That was the worst of it, — Nuisance knew the thin tyrant skein by which he held him irrevocably linked! Christmas was yet to come and for what Christmas

might hold Skippy possessed his soul in patience.

Then the blow fell. A week later as Snorky Green was returning from the village he perceived Dennis de Brian de Boru in a state of excitement waving a newspaper at him from the porch.

"There must be another birth in the faculty," thought Snorky, puzzled to ascribe an adequate reason. Such events, be it mentioned, were usually attended by cuts and in the higher spheres with even a half holiday.

Finnegan rushed forward, dove at his knees and spilled him on the ground joyously.

"Damn you, you mad Irishman," said Snorky picking himself up and disentangling himself from the newspaper. "What 's hit you anyway?"

"It 's come, hooray!"

"What 's come?"

"Skippy 's free!"

Snorky, further mystified, seized Finnegan and having sufficiently shaken him demanded an explanation.

"Eighth page, first column, ouch!" said Finnegan.

Snorky opened it and read:

MISS POTTERMAN TO MARRY
HAROLD B. DRINKWATER

At this moment the door opened and Skippy came heavily out.

"Have you seen it?" said Dennis breathlessly.

"Seen what?"

"The paper!"

"What 's in the paper?"

Dennis glanced at Snorky and solemnly handed over the fatal announcement. All levity had disappeared. A man's sorrow after all must be sacred.

Skippy read and suddenly put down the paper. Only two things came to his mind—wedding immediate and she had not even written him.

At this most auspicious moment, Nuisance came gamboling around the house.

"Hi, Skippy, old sport, what ye doin'?"

Dennis de Brian de Boru looked at Snorky and then simultaneously each sat down and retired into an expectant audience.

Nuisance frolicked enthusiastically up for his victim and then stopped. He had just caught Skippy's expression. He stopped and suddenly looked at the ground. He *knew!*

Slowly, carefully, warily with his eyes on Skippy he began a strategic withdrawal. Skippy moved stealthily forward, picking up his steps as a rat terrier does. Nuisance slunk away, calculating the distance to the corner of the house. Skippy increased the pace, drawing ominously nearer.

Then Finnegan's shrill voice cried:

"Sic him, Skippy!"

The next moment, Nuisance, panic-stricken, was scuttling for his life, with Skippy roaring at his heels.

And just back of the lonely stretches of the Dickinson, Skippy fell upon him.

That night Skippy, wise by disillusionment, confided his sorrows to a diary which began as follows:

"What I don't know about women, ain't worth knowing. Resolved; if any loving is going to be done, they can do the loving."

But that of course is still another story. . . .

THE END